NATION

50,000 affected by flash flood in Odisha

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BUSINESS

Net direct tax collection dips 1.39% to Rs 4.59L crore

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SPORTS

Neeraj Chopra beats Weber to win Paris DL title

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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Belagavi gets 1st anti-stabbing squad in State

BELAGAVI, 21 JUNE

The Belagavi Police Commissionerate launched an 'anti-stabbing squad,' the first of its kind in the State. The squad was launched to avoid attacks in public places within the Commissionerate limits. Officers in the squad are permitted to search people in public places while in civil clothes. The squad, headed by DCP Rohan Jagadish, has two circle inspectors among other staff. Belagavi Police Commissioner Bhushan Borase told press on Saturday that the squad is authorised to check people and their bags who they find suspicious. Those found carrying weapons will be classified as 'rowdy sheeters,' police said. The squad began work on Saturday, checking mainly college student.

—Salar News

>>>>More on Page 2

3 AI officials fired, DGCA threatens to ban licence

MUMBAI, 21 JUNE

India's aviation regulator, the DGCA, has ordered Air India to remove three senior officials, including a divisional vice-president, from all duties related to crew scheduling due to serious lapses. The directive, issued on 20 June, follows Air India's voluntary disclosure of repeated violations involving unqualified crew being scheduled for flights, breaches in rest and licensing norms, and poor oversight during the transition from ARMS to CAE's crew management system. The DGCA cited systemic failures and a lack of disciplinary action against those responsible. Air India has complied, with its Chief Operations Officer now overseeing the Integrated Operations Control Centre. The warning comes in the wake of the 12 June crash of flight AI-171 in Ahmedabad, which killed nearly all 242 on board and 29 people on the ground.*—PTI*

>>>>More on Page 3

Bike taxi riders detained during protest in B'luru

BENGALURU, 21 JUNE

A group of bike taxi riders staging a protest outside Vidhana Soudha on Saturday were detained by police, as they demanded the Karnataka government lift the suspension of bike taxi services and introduce a regulatory framework to govern their operations. The protest followed the Karnataka High Court's directive suspending bike taxi services across the state. The riders urged the government to urgently implement clear rules allowing them to resume operations, stressing that bike taxis provide employment to thousands and serve as a vital part of the urban transport ecosystem. According to police, the protestors gathered without prior permission and were promptly detained and dispersed. A case has been registered against them for violating public assembly guidelines and attempting an unauthorised demonstration near Vidhana Soudha. The riders called for a balanced regulatory policy that addresses safety concerns without jeopardising their livelihoods. Earlier this month, a division bench of the Karnataka High Court refused to stay a previous single-judge order from 2 April that directed the suspension of bike taxi services. Companies including Uber, Ola, and Rapido had appealed against the ruling.

—PTI

827 INDIANS EVACUATED FROM IRAN AMID CONFLICT

India evacuates Nepalese and Lankans too

NEW DELHI/TEHRAN, 21 JUNE

India has successfully evacuated more than 827 of its nationals from Iran under Operation Sindhu, launched in response to escalating hostilities between Iran and Israel. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) confirmed on Saturday that 517 Indian nationals had returned home so far, with evacuation flights continuing.

Late Friday night, a charter flight from Iran's Mashhad brought 290 Indians, mostly students and religious pilgrims, to New Delhi. Early Saturday morning, another evacuation flight from Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, arrived with more evacuees.

On Saturday, a Mahan Air flight carrying 256 Indian students, many from Jammu and Kashmir, landed in Delhi. The Jammu and Kashmir Students' Association praised the government's coordination with Iranian authorities and confirmed another evacuation flight was expected to arrive at around 11:30 pm. The students, visibly exhausted, expressed relief at having escaped the conflict zone.

According to the MEA, nearly 1,000 Indian nationals are being brought home via special flights, including two additional scheduled flights from Iran and Turkmenistan. The Indian Embassy in Tehran has issued emergency contact numbers and a Telegram channel to coordinate evacuation efforts.

In a notable move, India has extended its evacuation mission to include Nepalese and Sri Lankan citizens stranded in Iran, following requests from their respective governments. The Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry confirmed that fewer than 100 of its nationals in Iran may now avail of Indian flights.

India launched Operation Sindhu on Wednesday after regional air travel disruptions and rising security concerns made conditions precarious for foreign nationals in Iran.

The Indian government has thanked Iran for facilitating airspace access and supporting the evacuation, calling it a testament to strong bilateral cooperation during a crisis.

—PTI

>>>>More on Pages 3, 5 & 6

Indian nationals who were evacuated from Iran under Operation Sindhu arrive at Delhi airport *PHOTO: SCREENGRAB*

Israel in touch with India on evacuation

Amid escalating Iran-Israel tensions, Israeli Ambassador to India Reuven Azar said Israel is in "constant contact" with the MEA regarding Indian nationals' evacuation. He assured that messages from the Indian government are taken "very seriously" to ensure citizens' safety. India began evacuations after an Iranian missile struck a hospital in Beersheba. Evacuees from Israel will be assisted via land routes and air. Operation Sindhu is already evacuating Indians from Iran.

25 MUSLIMS DEAD

India saw 947 hate crimes in 1st year of Modi 3.0

BENGALURU, 21 JUNE

A disturbing rise in hate crimes and hate speech has been recorded across India during the first year of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's third term, according to a report.

Between 7 June, 2024, and 7 June, 2025, 947 incidents were reported, with religious minorities—particularly Muslims and Christians — bearing the brunt, said a report by the Association for Protection of Civil Rights (APCR) and the Quill Foundation.

Of the total, 602 were hate crimes, including 173 involving physical violence. At least 25 victims, all Muslims, lost their lives. Another 345 incidents were categorised as hate speech, with 178 attributed to individuals linked to the BJP. BJP-ruled states saw a higher frequency of such incidents, particularly during local and national election campaigns.

Uttar Pradesh reported the highest number of hate crimes (217), while Manipur reported the least (1). Twelve of the 25 most-affected regions were BJP-governed, with four of the top five remaining under BJP rule throughout the year. Notably, 25 Hindus were also affected—often women and mostly due to proximity to the primary targets.

At least 2,964 individuals targeted

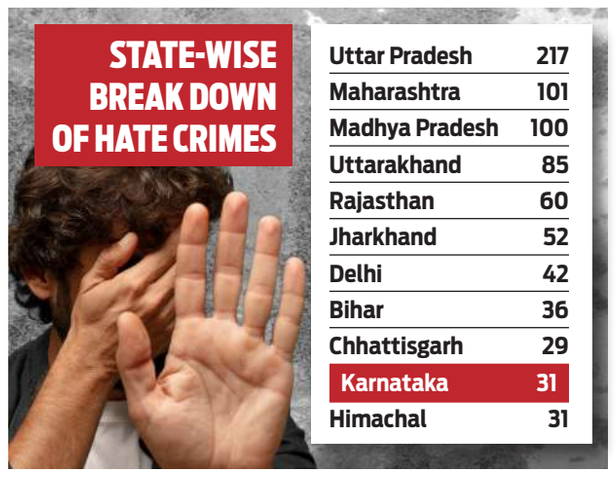
At least 2,964 individuals were targeted: 1,460 Muslims and 1,504 Christians. Muslims, however, faced more severe and repeated violence, including mob attacks and public humiliation. Victims included 62 children and 10 elderly individuals.

Right-wing groups such as Bajrang Dal, VHP, and RSS were implicated in 267 hate crimes, including assaults on minority businesses, places of worship, and interfaith events. Major spikes in violence followed religious festivals and the April 2025 Pahalgam terror attack, which alone saw 87 hate crimes in just 13 days.

Modi was linked to five hate speechs, while BJP Chief Ministers accounted for 63.

—Salar News

A campaign call for boycott of Muslim-owned businesses in Bhopal Shamgad and Dewas of MP in October 2024 *PHOTO: SCREENGRAB*



A STRETCH FOR BETTER HEALTH

Participants perform yoga at Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru on Saturday, marking the 11th International Day of Yoga. The day was proposed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the UNGA in 2014 and declared by the UN on 11 December that year, with support from 177 countries *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD* *>>>More on Pages 2 & 4*

Low on fuel, IndiGo flight calls 'Mayday'; lands in Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 21 JUNE

An IndiGo flight from Guwahati to Chennai carrying 168 passengers made an emergency landing at Bengaluru's Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) after the pilot issued a 'Mayday' call due to critically low fuel levels. The incident occurs in the wake of a tragic Air India crash in Ahmedabad that resulted in the deaths of 241 passengers, leaving one survivor.

The flight, designated as 6E-6764, departed Guwahati at 4.40pm and was scheduled to land in Chennai at approximately 7.45pm. However, upon touching down, the pilot executed a 'balked landing' and opted for a go-around. Reports indicate that about 35 miles from Bengaluru, the captain communicated a distress signal to Air Traffic Control (ATC).

Witnesses aboard described a sudden and sharp climb that left many passengers alarmed. Speaking anonymously, one passenger recounted, "The sudden and steep climb had many passengers on the edge of their seats, some visibly frightened."

Following the distress call, KIA personnel mobilised, with medical and firefighting teams on standby for the aircraft's arrival. The IndiGo flight landed safely at 8.20pm, with all passengers unharmed.

It has been reported that both pilots have been temporarily relieved of their duties, though IndiGo has not officially confirmed this information. In a separate incident on Friday, an IndiGo flight en route to Madurai faced technical difficulties mid-air and was permitted to return to Chennai, landing safely with 68 passengers aboard. The passenger heaved in sigh of relief after safe landing of the flight.

—PTI

Russia, India finalising economic partnership

MOSCOW, 21 JUNE

Russian President Vladimir Putin announced on Friday that Moscow's long-term cooperation plan with India, extending to 2030, will be finalised shortly. Speaking at the St Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF) 2025, themed "Shared Values: The Foundation of Growth in a Multipolar World," Putin highlighted efforts to deepen economic ties with key partners, including India. He emphasised boosting oil and gas exports, reducing trade barriers, and strengthening investment and infrastructure links.

India was represented by Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, who delivered keynote addresses on artificial intelligence and at the India-Russia Business Forum. He underscored India's commitment to ethical AI and expanding strategic cooperation with Russia. Vaishnaw also held talks with Russian ministers and business leaders on collaboration in railways, IT, infrastructure, and logistics.

—PTI

CENTRE, KARNATAKA TO COMPENSATE MANGO FARMERS

NEW DELHI, 21 JUNE

The Central and Karnataka governments have agreed to jointly compensate mango farmers in the state for losses caused by a sharp fall in market prices, particularly for the Totapuri variety.

As per an official statement issued on Saturday, the relief will apply to up to 2.5 lakh tonnes of mangoes, 25 per cent of the State's estimated production of 10 lakh tonnes.

The decision was taken during a video conference between Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan and Karnataka Agriculture Minister N Chaluvaraya Swamy.

Karnataka had earlier submitted a proposal highlighting sustained price declines for tomatoes and mangoes. While tomato prices have since stabilised, mango growers — especially Totapuri producers — continue to suffer low returns.

—PTI

TRUMP SAYS WON'T GET IT

Pak nominates Trump for Nobel peace

WASHINGTON, 21 JUNE

US President Donald Trump has lamented that he will never receive the Nobel Peace Prize, despite what he claims are major diplomatic achievements—including "stopping" a war between India and Pakistan.

Shortly after Trump's remarks, the Pakistan government announced it would formally recommend him for the 2026 Nobel Peace Prize for his "decisive diplomatic intervention" during the India-Pakistan crisis. In a post on X, Islamabad lauded Trump's "strategic foresight and stellar statesmanship," crediting him with defusing a rapidly escalating conflict between two nuclear states.

Tensions spiked after the 22 April Pahalgam terror attack, prompting India to carry out strikes on terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir on 7 May.

Pakistan responded with attacks on May 8–10, before both sides agreed to cease hostilities following DGMO-level talks on May 10.

Trump has repeatedly claimed that his intervention led to the ceasefire. However, India has firmly denied any foreign mediation, stating that the de-escalation resulted from direct military-to-military engagement, initiated at Pakistan's request. In his Truth Social post, Trump also highlighted his involvement in several global peace efforts, including arranging a treaty between Rwanda and Congo.

Noting that representatives from both countries will be in Washington on Monday to sign the documents, he described it as a "Great Day for Africa and, quite frankly, a Great Day for the World!"

—PTI

DKS denies K'taka Cong MLA's corruption charge against own govt

BENGALURU, 21 JUNE

Senior Congress MLA BR Patil on Saturday said that his claims about bribery in the allotment of public housing were true, even as State Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar condemned the legislator's statement and made it clear that such things cannot be accepted.

Patil, also the Karnataka State Policy and Planning Commission Deputy Chairman, had alleged bribery in the allotment of houses in a phone conversation with Housing Minister BZ Zameer Ahmed Khan's private secretary Sarfaraz Khan, in a leaked phone conversation.

Speaking to reporters, Patil, the Congress MLA from Aland said, it is his voice in the audio and that he has spoken the truth.

—PTI

>>>More on Page 2

PHOTO: X

Govt officials booked over electrocution death

BENGALURU, 21 JUNE

An FIR was registered against Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) and the Bangalore Electricity Supply Company Limited (BESCOM) officials in connection with the death of a 10-year-old boy due to electrocution in KR Puram area, police said on Saturday. The incident occurred on 15 June when Ananth, a native of Nepal, while playing with a broom on the third-floor of his rented accommodation, came into contact with a high-tension wire, they said. According to the police, the boy was alone at home in Swatantra Nagar when the incident occurred. His mother, a house help, was at work at that time. The succumbed to injuries on Friday, despite neighbours attempting to rescue him and rushing him to a hospital. *—PTI*

2 held for forging sign to transfer land in Bidar

BIDAR, 21 JUNE

Two officials have been suspended for illegally transferring land registered in a person's name to another by forging the digital signature of Bidar tahsildar, Dilshad Ali Mahat in Bidar district. Srujan and Ambarish, second division assistants in the Tahsildar's office allegedly transferred 8 acres and 13 guntas of land belonging to Jagannath in Nandgaon village to Mohammad Ismail illegally. Of the total 12 acres and 21 guntas of land, Ismail owned 4 acres and 8 guntas. The remaining 8 acres and 13 guntas belonged to Jagannath The duo were suspended after the matter came to light. *—Salar News*

DKS flays MLA's claims on housing allotment bribery

MLA confirms call authenticity, but says corruption isn't new

BENGALURU, 21 JUNE

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar condemned senior State Congress MLA BR Patil's claims about bribery in the allotment of public housing, as the latter confirmed the authenticity of the leaked calls.

"I don't accept it for any reason. I have not understood what he (Patil) has said. The matter has come to the notice of the Chief Minister. He will take necessary action," Shivakumar told reporters here. "When house allotments are happening in a transparent way, how can any beneficiary pay the money? Who makes the decision? It is Panchayats and local bodies. How will this money matter come to the minister in the government?"

Patil, also the Karnataka State Policy and Planning Commission Deputy Chairman, had alleged bribery in the allotment of houses in a phone conversation with Housing Minister BZ Zameer Ahmed Khan's private secretary Sarfaraz Khan, in a leaked phone conversation.

State Policy and Planning Commission Deputy Chairman HK Patil and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar *PHOTOS: PTI*

Speaking to reporters, Patil, the Congress MLA from Aland said, it is his voice in the audio and that he has spoken the truth.

"It is my voice (in the audio). I have spoken....I have said whatever I have to. I don't know what the Chief Minister will do. If he calls me I will go and speak to him," he said. "What is negative? I have spoken the truth."

To a question about whether houses were allotted on giving money, the MLA said, not in all cases, but it was present in five-six panchayats.

Asked whether corruption continues in this government, he said, "During all governments it (corruption) has happened, but we (Congress) came to power promising pro-people administration and such things shouldn't happen."

Hitting out at the BJP for targeting the Congress government using his remarks, the MLA said, "The BJP are not clean. They are the ones who have done dirty things... even today efforts are on to clean (the) administration under Siddaramaiah." *—PTI*

> **Now the question is -- will any action be taken against the said minister? Will there be a CBI or an independent judicial probe in this matter? Because the allegation hasn't come from the BJP or any activist -- it has been made by a Congress MLA**
>
> -Shehzad Poonawalla, BJP leader

> **It is my voice (in the audio)... (But) BJP people are not clean. They are the ones who have done dirty things...even today efforts are on to give a clean administration under Siddaramaiah**
>
> -BR Patil, Congress Leader

> **With what intention has he (Patil) spoken? It is not right. I condemn it. The CM and I will speak to him -- it is not right. There is no such thing**
>
> -DK Shivakumar, Deputy Chief Minister

Act on illegal mining: HK Patil to CM

BENGALURU/RAICHUR, 21 JUNE

The State Law Minister HK Patil has expressed serious concerns regarding the government's inadequate response to illegal mining cases in the state.

In a letter addressed to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, dated 18 June, Patil highlighted that only 7.6 per cent of illegal mining cases from 2007 to 2011, which allegedly caused a loss of around Rs 1.5 lakh crore to the government, have been investigated.

Patil noted public outrage over the lack of action and urged for accountability, asserting that the culprits must be punished and the lost wealth recovered. He reminded Siddaramaiah of his own 320-km foot march against the illegal mining scandal in 2010, when the Congress was the Opposition.

HK Patil *PHOTO: PTI*

Speaking to reporters in Raichur, Patil reiterated that his letter was not politically motivated but aimed at serving the state's interests. He acknowledged there are concerns about potential destruction of related documents and warned the administration to prevent this.

Despite the efforts of a Cabinet sub-committee during the previous Siddaramaiah-led government and numerous cases registered, Patil lamented that only 0.2 per cent of all cases have reached a conclusion. He advocated for establishing a Recovery Commissioner and creating a new Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe uninvestigated cases, alongside the establishment of a special court for their adjudication.

"The government still has time to act," he asserted.*—PTI*

PRIYANK RAPS MEA ON VISA APPROVAL

BENGALURU, 21 JUNE

Karnataka Minister Priyank Kharge on Saturday asked the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) to explain the "politics" behind initially denying and then approving his delegation's US visit and accused the Centre of denying Karnataka its right to seek investments from abroad.

Kharge asked why MEA allowed the trip after initially denying it.

"What is the point of granting clearance after the key events are either over or nearing completion?" Kharge wrote on X.

He described the MEA's actions as taking a "belated U-turn." *—PTI*

People tied cows inside Parasapur Kannada Lower Primary School premises, making the campus dirty *PHOTO: SALAR*

With no compound wall, Yadgir school turns into cowshed

YOHAN P HONNADDI
YADGIR, 21 JUNE

Concerned parents alleged that the Government Kannada Lower Primary School in Parasapur, Shahapur taluk, Yadgir district, lacked a compound wall, and had turned into a cattle shed.

Private individuals tied cattle inside the school premises, parents alleged, due to which the area is filled with cow dung and filth, creating an unhygienic environment that was not conducive for learning.

The parents claimed that the School Development Monitoring Committee (SDMC) –which is supposed to observe school's academic activities, infrastructure and other operations – was completely absent.

"Every day, we have to step on cow dung while entering the school. There's no space to play. We want a clean and beautiful playground," a student told Salar News.

Locals and parents alike urged officials to visit the school.

"Authorities must visit the school immediately and warn those responsible, ensuring a better atmosphere for the students," Venkatesh, a resident of Parasapur, told Salar News.

Locals added that authorities must build a compound wall around the school.

The school premises were filled with cowdung *PHOTO: SALAR*

"As a result, locals are tying cattle here. If a compound wall is constructed, this issue will be resolved," Venkappa Dore, Gram Panchayat Member, Parasapur noted.

Deputy Director of Public Instruction, Channabasappa Mudhol acknowledged the issue.

Shahapur taluka Block Education Officer YS Hargi and BRC Renuka Patil's team visited the school on Thursday.

"We have written letter to the Taluk Panchayat Executive Officer, recommending the provision of several basic facilities including drinking water, a compound wall, and toilets for the school," Mudhol said. *—Salar News*

MANGALURU HOSTS 'JALA YOGA' EVENT IN POOL

MANGALURU, 21 JUNE

Mangaluru celebrated International Yoga Day with a distinctive aquatic twist—through Jala yoga, or water yoga.

Held at the Mangaluru City Corporation Swimming Pool, the event saw around 40 members of an amateur swimmers' group perform yoga postures such as Padmasana and Shavasana while floating in 16-feet-deep water.

The organisers of the event highlighted how water yoga—a blend of traditional yoga postures, breathing techniques, and meditation practiced in water—can enhance both physical fitness and mental relaxation.

Adding a creative note to the celebrations, retired Dean of the Mangalore University of Fisheries, SM Shivaprakash, wrote a postcard to Prime Minister Narendra Modi while swimming.

The event was organised by the amateur swimmers' group in collaboration with the city's public swimming pool, under the theme of this year's Yoga Day: One Earth, One Health. *—PTI*

WORLD YOGA DAY

A massive yoga event outside the Mysuru palace (left). The event featured 50 children and youth with visual impairments; Volunteers practice yoga at Vidhana Soudha, in Bengaluru, on Saturday (below) *PHOTOS: SALAR/MOHAMMED ASAD*

Yettinahole project will be done by 2027: DKS

BENGALURU, 21 JUNE

The State government's Yettinahole project aims to deliver water to Kolar by 2027, announced Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar. He stated that discussions with the Forest Department addressed various project-related issues, including land acquisition and financing for a balanced reservoir in Bairagonda, Lakkenahalli.

Shivakumar pledged to implement changes based on ministerial suggestions and highlighted his intent to raise project concerns at the forthcoming cabinet meeting. "Our government's resolve is to deliver Yettinahole water to Kolar by 2027," he affirmed, stating that site inspections had been conducted to review the project's progress.

Last September, the project's first stage was inaugurated by the Chief Minister during the Gowri festival. In August, Shivakumar referred to revealed that 164km of the 252.87km project was complete, with some progress hindered by land acquisition issues affecting a 25.87 km segment. "Five of the eight barrages are finished, and about 1,500 cusecs of water have been lifted," he noted. *—ANI*

Deputy Chief Minister DK Sivakumar inspects the lift pump house work under the Yettinahole project in Kolar Saturday *PHOTO: PTI*

ON A MISSION

Belagavi launches first 'anti-stabbing squad' in State

BELAGAVI, 21 JUNE

The Belagavi Police Commissionerate launched an 'anti-stabbing squad,' the first in the State. The squad was launched to avoid attacks in public places within the Commissionerate limits.

Officers in the squad are permitted to search people in public places while in civil clothes. The squad, headed by DCP Rohan Jagadish, has two circle inspectors among other staff.

Belagavi Police Commissioner Bhushan Borase told press on Saturday that the squad is authorised to check people and their bags who they find suspicious.

Belagavi Police Commissioner Bhushan Borase said the squad was allowed to wear civilian clothes while on duty *PHOTO: X*

"People need not to be scared as it was for their safety. Those who were found carrying weapons mainly the knives, longs, rods etc will be categorised as 'Rowdy Sheeters' and expelled from the Commissionerate limits," he said.

- The squad was necessitated after a PUC student was stabbed by two minors in a Belagavi city bus, after an argument over a window seat

"Youngsters are increasing involved in crimes in crimes. People are using swords to cut cakes during celebration nowadays. Hence, the police started the squad," Commissioner Borase said, adding that the squad has been instructed not to trouble people whom they check, not file false cases and threat them.

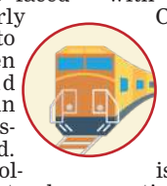
The squad began work on Saturday checked mainly college student. They told students not to be scared as it was the routine checkup.

The squad was necessitated after a PUC student was stabbed by two minors in a Belagavi city bus. A quarrel broke out over a window seat on the bus, following which a minor called his friend, also underaged, and the pair stabbed the victim in the stomach. *—Salar News*

LANDSLIDE DISRUPTS SAKLESHPUR TRAINS

MANGALURU, 21 JUNE

Train services along the vital Sakleshpur–Subrahmanya Road stretch in State faced disruption in the early hours of Saturday due to a landslide between Edakumari and Shiribagilu stations in Dakshina Kannada district, officials reported. Boulders from a hill collapsed onto the railway tracks designated for cargo trains, causing delays.



KSR Bengaluru–Kannur Express experienced a delayed departure as a result of the obstruction.

Similarly, SMVT Bengaluru–Murdeshwar Express along with Vijayapura–Mangaluru Central Express Special, also faced delays.

Railway officials advised passengers to monitor real-time updates for their trains via the NTES or 'Where is My Train' mobile applications.

For emergencies, they can contact @RailwaySeva on X or call the helpline number 139. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Film abhi baaki hai: Gadkari on 2029 role

NAGPUR, 21 JUNE

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari has described past 11 years of governance under Prime Minister Narendra Modi as merely a "news reel," asserting that the "real film" is yet to unfold. In an interview with Uday Nirgudkar, Gadkari stated that it is the party's prerogative to allocate responsibilities and that he is prepared to serve in any role assigned to him. He emphasised his dedication to working towards alleviating farmer suicides, noting his focus on agricultural & social initiatives over infrastructure projects. When quizzed about India's per capita income rankings, Gadkari attributed challenge to the country's population growth and backed population control measures, highlighting the economic implications rather than religious or linguistic considerations. *—PTI*

Bharat Mata row continues: CPI(M) accuses Kerala Guv

THIRUVANA NTHAPURAM, 21 JUNE

Kerala's Raj Bhavan is at the centre of a political row after CPI(M) accused Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar of promoting RSS ideology by displaying a Bharat Mata portrait during official events. Deshabhimani, the CPI(M)'s mouthpiece, criticised the use of the saffron-flag-bearing image, calling it a violation of constitutional norms. Ministers V Sivankutty and P Prasad boycotted functions in protest, while the Students' Federation of India erected banners stating Raj Bhavan is not "RSS's ancestral property". Meanwhile, Raj Bhavan dismissed reports of seeking central security as "absolutely baseless", affirming confidence in Kerala Police and accusing the media of speculation. *—PTI*

Union Min Sanjay to testify in phone tapping case

HYDERABAD, 21 JUNE

Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Bandi Sanjay Kumar, is set to appear as a witness in an investigation into alleged illegal phone tapping during the previous Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) government in Telangana. The Chief Minister, A Revanth Reddy, previously advocated for a CBI investigation into the case. Sanjay, who has been vocal about the phone-tapping allegations since his tenure as Telangana BJP president, recounted his experience of being detained under the BRS administration. Meanwhile, authorities continue to interrogate T Prabhakar Rao, former SIB chief implicated in the scandal involving clandestine monitoring of political opponents. *—PTI*

BRS MLA Kaushik Reddy arrested in extortion case

HYDERABAD, 21 JUNE

Padi Kaushik Reddy, a Member of the Legislative Assembly from the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) in Telangana, has been arrested by police in Warangal on allegations of extortion. The Huzurabad MLA was detained at Rajiv Gandhi International Airport after reportedly threatening a quarry owner to pay an initial sum of Rs 25 lakh, with further demands for Rs 50 lakh allegedly made thereafter. BRS Working President KT Rama Rao condemned the arrest, contending that such actions are politically motivated attempts to silence Kaushik Reddy for questioning the governance and alleged corruption of CM A Revanth Reddy and his ministers. Rao has called for immediate & unconditional release of MLA, stating that charges are fabricated & aimed at undermining dissent within political landscape. *—PTI*

DGCA cracks down on AI over serious lapses

247 victims identified through DNA tests & 232 bodies have been handed over to kin

MUMBAI, 21 JUNE

Aviation safety watchdog DGCA has ordered Tata Group-owned Air India to remove its three officials, including a divisional vice president, from all roles and responsibilities related to crew scheduling and rostering over serious lapses.

In its order of 20 June, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) also directed the airline to initiate proceedings against these three officials without delay.

Air India in a statement said it has acknowledged the regulator's directive and implemented the order.

"In the interim, the company's Chief Operations Officer will provide direct oversight to the Integrated Operations Control Centre (IOCC). Air India is committed to ensuring that there is total adherence to safety protocols and standard practices," the airline said in its statement on Saturday.

The DGCA order said: "Repeated and serious violations voluntarily disclosed by Air India concerning flight crew being scheduled and operated despite lapses in licensing, rest, and recency requirements.

Family members and relatives during the funeral of Inayat Ali Saiyed, his wife Nafeesabanu Saiyed, daughter Taskinbanu Saiyed and nephew Vaki Ali Saiyed, who were killed in the Air India plane crash, at Khanpur in Ahmedabad, on Saturday *PHOTO: PTI*

"These violations were discovered during the post-transition review from ARMS to the CAE Flight and Crew Management System."

The DGCA also warned AI that future violations in crew scheduling will invite "strict action", including licence suspension and operational restrictions.

The latest direction from DGCA has come at a time when the airline has been under strict scrutiny in the aftermath of the Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner crash last week.

Additionally, a total of 247 victims of the horrific 12 June Ahmedabad plane crash have been identified through DNA tests so far and 232 bodies have been handed over to kin, officials said on Saturday. *—PTI*

LAST RITES OF AIR INDIA CREW MEMBER IRFAN SHAIKH HELD

PUNE, 21 JUNE

The Shaikh family received 22-year-old to Irfan Shaikh, a crew member of the ill-fated Air India, remains after a DNA match on Friday, and they were brought to Pune in early hours of the day. Relatives and friends gave an emotional farewell to Irfan, as his remains were laid to rest at Pimpri Chinchwad in Maharashtra, on Saturday.

MISSING FILMMAKER CONFIRMED DEAD IN AIR INDIA PLANE CRASH

AHMEDABAD, 21 JUNE

Filmmaker Mahesh Jirawala, 34, has been confirmed dead in the plane crash, following DNA testing, police said on Saturday. Jirawala, was passing through Meghaninagar on his scooter when the aircraft crashed into a hostel. His remains were unrecognisable. To reassure his grieving family, police presented CCTV footage, mobile location data, and his burnt scooter, matched via chassis and engine numbers. His wife Hetal recalled his last call at 1.14pm, saying he was heading home after a meeting. When he didn't return and his phone switched off, the family feared the worst. His body was handed over on Friday.

FATF flags Pakistan over missile development scheme

PARIS, 21 JUNE

A new report by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has raised concerns over Pakistan's violation of international norms through its involvement in ballistic missile development. The report highlights a 2020 incident where Indian customs officials seized a shipment bound for Pakistan, containing dual-use goods mis-declared in export documents.

The FATF's latest report on Complex Proliferation Financing and Sanctions Evasion Schemes reveals that the consignment, falsely labelled as "autoclaves", was linked to Pakistan's state-run National Development Complex — an entity engaged in missile production. These items are on the dual-use export control lists under the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), including India's own list, due to their application in high-energy material and missile motor coating processes.

The disclosure comes as the FATF increases scrutiny of Pakistan following the 22 April terrorist attack in Pahalgam, J& K.

India is now reportedly stepping up diplomatic efforts to push for Pakistan's re-entry onto FATF grey list.

Officials said, intelligence regarding terror financing and state-backed proliferation has been shared with key FATF members. *—Agencies*

Polling videos violate voters' privacy: EC

NEW DELHI, 21 JUNE

Gyanesh Kumar *PHOTO: ANI*

The Election Commission of India has firmly opposed demands from opposition parties, including Congress, for the public release of webcasting footage from polling stations, citing privacy and security concerns for voters.

Officials stated that while the request appears to be framed in the interest of safeguarding the democratic process, it could, in reality, undermine voter protection. They warned that publicly sharing footage would enable the identification of individuals who voted or abstained, exposing them to potential intimidation from anti-social elements.

They illustrated the risks, stating that a political party receiving fewer votes at a specific booth could utilise CCTV footage to target voters, leading to harassment. The Commission clarified that it retains CCTV footage as an internal management tool for 45 days post-election, coinciding with the period allowed for filing election petitions. Footage may be retained beyond this if a legal challenge is initiated.

Moreover, concerns over the misuse of electronic data have led the Election Commission to instruct state election officers to destroy CCTV and webcasting footage after the 45-day period unless a petition is filed. Recently amended electoral rules restrict public inspection of certain electronic documents to prevent misuse, following the rise of misinformation on social media stemming from selectively released materials.

In a communication to state chief electoral officers, the Commission reaffirmed its commitment to maintaining voter privacy and secrecy, a principle enshrined in law and upheld by the Supreme Court. *—PTI*

> **It is clear that the match is fixed. And a fixed election is poison for democracy**
>
> -Rahul Gandhi, Congress leader

Bihar govt increases monthly pension by Rs 700 in poll push

PATNA, 21 JUNE

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Saturday said his government has decided to increase the pensions of senior citizens, widows and people with disability by Rs 700 per month.

The beneficiaries will get enhanced pensions of Rs 1,100 from July, he said.

The pension amount will be sent to the accounts of all beneficiaries on the 10th day of every month, he said.

"This decision of the government will help beneficiaries and will ensure they lead a dignified and socially secure life, which is the top priority of the government. Social security is recognised as a vital component of the development process," Social Welfare Department Secretary Bandana Preyashi told PTI.

The total number of beneficiaries for the pension scheme in the state is over 1.09 crore, the CM said.

The decision assumes significance as the state will go to the assembly polls in a few months.

- The total number of beneficiaries for the pension scheme in the state is over 1.09 crore, CM said. The increase in pension will result in an additional burden of around Rs 3594.42 crore annually on the state exchequer, an official said on condition of anonymity.

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Earlier, the government was spending Rs 5,405.58 crore, and now it will have to spend around Rs 9,000 crore annually. *—PTI*

Defence delegation meets French counterparts in Paris

PARIS, 21 JUNE

An Indian defence delegation, led by Joint Secretary and Acquisition Manager Dinesh Kumar, convened with French defence officials at the Paris Air Show on Thursday. The French delegation was headed by Lt Gen Gael Diaz De Tuesta, Director General of Armament, and meeting marked formal launch of Rafale marine programme.

Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Dinesh Kumar Tripathi attended a Key Leader Engagement hosted virtually by US Navy's Pacific Fleet Admiral Stephen T Koehler, underscoring his vision for "achieving maritime security in Indo-Pacific through innovation and technology," in a conference that included 19 nations.

Admiral Tripathi noted that Op Sindoor is currently on pause but remains active. He also discussed growing significance of non-contact warfare, particularly in relation to counter-drone systems. *—ANI*

Instagram page 'The Savala Vada' banned

NEW DELHI, 21 JUNE

The Instagram account of satirical page 'The Savala Vada', known for its humorous critiques of government, has been suspended in India, sparking controversy.

The account, which boasts 85,000 followers and is run by a 22-year-old creator and his team from Kerala, announced the ban on X (formerly Twitter), stating, "Sup we just got banned from the world's largest democracy #MotherOfDemocracy #NotSatire #SavalaVadaFried."

The page features memes styled like a newspaper's front pages, addressing current events and societal issues.

Following the suspension, The Savala Vada posted an image of Prime Minister Narendra Modi aimed at its account, labelling the action absurd while highlighting pressing national issues such as poverty and caste atrocities.

Launched on 21 July, 2023 and inspired by The Onion, the team expressed their disbelief at government's focus on banning satire over more pressing matters. *—Agencies*

OPERATION SINDHU

'Can't express what it feels like to be back home'

NEW DELHI, 21 JUNE

Emotional scenes unfolded at Delhi airport late on Friday night as Indian nationals evacuated from Mashhad, Iran, under Operation Sindhu returned home amid escalating tensions between Iran and Israel.

"The Indian government has done a lot for us, I can't express the peace you feel when you reach your own country," said a returnee who had travelled to Iran on pilgrimage. As evacuees disembarked, chants of 'Vande Mataram' and 'Bharat Mata ki Jai' echoed through the terminal. Some embraced each other, overwhelmed with relief.

The evacuation flight primarily carried students from Jammu and Kashmir, alongside others from Delhi, Haryana, Karnataka, and West Bengal.

One MBBS student from Tehran University of Medical Sciences described the return as "a journey full of struggles" and expressed deep gratitude to the Indian Embassy for their support. "Our parents were extremely worried. The help we received was immense," she said.

Indian National Evacuated From War-Torn Iran Describes Emotional Homecoming Under 'Operation Sindhu' *PHOTO: X @MEAIndia*

Meanwhile, the Tamil Nadu government announced the establishment of 24x7 control rooms to assist Tamils stranded in Iran and Israel.

Chief Minister MK Stalin directed officials to coordinate with Indian embassies and offer all possible support. A 24-hour control room has been set up at Tamil Nadu House in New Delhi (Helpline: 011-24193300; Mobile: 9289516712; Email: tnhouse@tn.gov.in / procofficetnh@gmail.com).

Additionally, a round-the-clock helpline has been established at the Commissionerate for the Welfare of Non-Resident Tamils (Toll-free: 1800-309-3793; Other contacts: +91 8069009901/9900; Email: nrtchennai@tn.gov.in / nrtchennai@gmail.com).

The government urged affected individuals to remain in touch with the Indian embassies in their respective regions and follow all advisories closely. *—PTI*

> **New Delhi's silence on the devastation in Gaza and now on the unprovoked escalation against Iran reflects a disturbing departure from our moral and diplomatic traditions. This represents not just a loss of voice but also a surrender of values**
>
> -Sonia Gandhi, Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson

Abdullah to move SC if J&K statehood restoration delays

ANANTNAG, 21 JUNE

National Conference President Farooq Abdullah on Saturday warned that his party may approach the Supreme Court if the Centre continues to delay the restoration of statehood to Jammu and Kashmir.

Speaking to reporters after a party meeting in Kokernag, south Kashmir, Abdullah said, "People have many expectations after the elections.

They want leaders like Altaf Kaloo to become ministers, but without statehood, that is impossible. We are waiting, but if the delay continues, we will have no option but to go to the Supreme Court."

He expressed hope that the return of statehood would bring back full democratic powers to the region.

Referring to the 22 April, Pahalgam terror attack that left 26 people, mostly tourists, dead, Abdullah questioned the security apparatus. "They claimed militancy is over. Then where did the attackers come from? We have so many forces, so many drones — yet we haven't found the four attackers."

National Conference President Farooq Abdullah *PHOTO: ANI*

Commenting on the Israel-Iran conflict, Abdullah said, "I pray God gives sense to both countries — and to Trump as well — to seek peace, not war.

Addressing his party workers earlier, Abdullah while referring to Pahalgam attack said the attackers managed to reach Baisaran and carry out attack despite the presence of so many security forces and technologies. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Undertrial prisoner slashes neck in police van

THANE, 21 JUNE

A 29-year-old undertrial prisoner has allegedly attempted suicide in a moving police van by slashing his neck. The incident took place on 20 June near the Aadharwadi signal in Kalyan, as Suraj Shankar Singh alias Virendra Mishra was being transferred from Kalyan Jail to Thane Central Jail. Mishra, opposing the transfer, argued with the escort team and demanded to be returned to Kalyan. He then pulled out a piece of blade from his mouth and injured himself despite attempts by the police to stop him. He was taken to hospital for treatment. An FIR was registered at Khadakpada police station. Police did not disclose the charges on Mishra. *—PTI*

UP man forces wife to marry 'lover' against her will

GONDA, 21 JUNE

A man, Harishchandra has arranged his wife Karishma's wedding to another man in a Uttar Pradesh village. Harishchandra, 42, claimed Karishma attempted to poison him and offered drugs to their son, leading to the unusual arrangement. During the wedding, Harishchandra washed off the sindoor from Karishma's forehead and witnessed her exchange garlands with Shivraj. Karishma, however, alleged that the wedding was forced upon her and denies any relationship with Shivraj. The couple, married for 15 years, has two children. After the temple ceremony, Karishma took their daughter with her, while their son remained with Harishchandra. No formal complaint has been filed with the police. *—PTI*

Manipur group demands safety zone for farmers

IMPHAL, 21 JUNE

The Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI) has demanded the creation of a 'farmer safety zone' along the periphery of Imphal Valley after a farmer, Ningthoujam Biren Singh, was shot while working in his field in Bishnupur district. COCOMI condemned the attack, which occurred despite multiple layers of security. The shots were fired from nearby Kuki-dominated hills in Churachandpur. COCOMI has called for shoot-at-sight orders against armed intruders, the designation of farmland near foothills as a 'no arms zone' and uninterrupted access for cultivation. It demanded additional troop deployment and round-the-clock patrolling. Over 260 people have died in the ethnic violence between Meiteis and Kukis since May 2023. *—PTI*

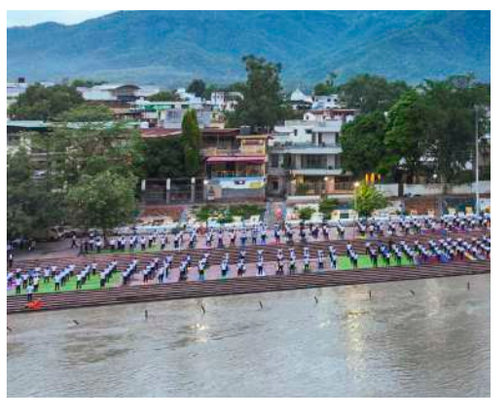
PHOTO: FREEPIK

UP coach gets life term for raping minor

MEERUT, 21 JUNE

A special POCSO court has sentenced Manish alias Max, to life imprisonment for raping a minor schoolgirl under his coaching. The court delivering the verdict on 21 June, imposed a Rs 50,000 fine. The incident occurred in 2023. The victim's mother filed an FIR alleging that Manish, a judo-karate coach at a school, raped her daughter and threatened her against speaking out. A resident of Anupnagar Fazalpur in Uttar Pradesh's Meerat district, Manish was charged under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, with police filing a chargesheet. *—PTI*

Indian Army organises yoga session; Prime Minister Narendra Modi participates at a yoga session in Visakhapatnam to mark the International Yoga Day; Union Home Minister Amit Shah at a yoga session in Ahmedabad.; the Archeological Survey of India hosted yoga sessions at 81 heritage sites, including Taj Mahal in Agra, Adalaj Ki Vav in Gujarat, Konark Sun Temple in Odisha and Jantar Mantar in New Delhi *PHOTO: PTI*



People performing yoga at Agra's Taj Mahal and in Rishikesh; NDRF and SDRF practise yoga at the Kedarnath Dham in Rudraprayag; Union minister Nirmala Sitharaman perform yoga in Faridabad's FINM campus *PHOTO: PTI*

74% millennials practise yoga: Report

66% of people recognise yoga's benefits, 52% have personally benefitted from them

NEW DELHI, 21 JUNE

A new study finds that 74 per cent of millennials include yoga in their daily wellness routines, making them the leading age group in regular practice, closely followed by Gen X at 70 per cent.

Conducted by ICICI Lombard General Insurance with a sample of nearly 1,000 respondents across both metro and non-metro areas, the pan-India study released on International Yoga Day explores health practices, motivations, and awareness levels, providing a snapshot of how Indians weave wellness into their everyday routines.

"As stress and burnout become the new epidemic, yoga is becoming a daily essential. India's timeless contribution to global health, yoga, offers a powerful, holistic path to living well.

"74 per cent of millennials now practise yoga regularly, a compelling indicator that today's middle-aged are investing not just in longevity, but in ageing well," said Sheena Kapoor, head marketing, corporate communications and CSR at ICICI Lombard.

Yoga has moved beyond a niche practice to become mainstream in India, with 72 per cent of respondents practising it regularly and another 18 per cent doing so occasionally.

However, the gap between awareness and experience continues to be significant. While 66 per cent of respondents recognise that yoga can reduce stress and anxiety, only 52 per cent have personally experienced these benefits".

Daily walks (69 per cent) and maintaining a balanced diet (68 per cent) rank among the top health practices adopted to enhance overall well-being. Gen X is at the forefront of embracing these habits, with men showing higher participation than women. *– PTI*

Armed forces celebrate International Day of Yoga at Siachen *PHOTO: ANI*

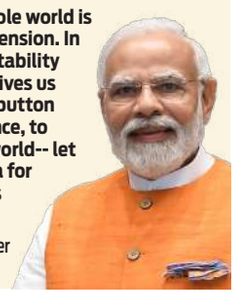
Andhra Pradesh sets 23 global records on Yoga Day

VISAKHAPATNAM, 21 JUNE

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Saturday said at the state set 23 global records – two Guinness Records and 21 World Book of Records – on the 11th International Yoga Day on Saturday.

3.03 lakh people performed yoga here, creating a world record for most people performing yoga at a single location. 22,122 tribal students simultaneously performing 108 Surya namaskar at the Andhra University campus on 20 June, thus creating the second Guinness World Record. —PTI

> **Unfortunately, today the whole world is going through some kind of tension. In many regions, unrest and instability are increasing. In such a situation, Yoga gives us the direction of peace. Yoga is the pause button that humanity needs to breathe, to balance, to become whole again. My request to the world-- let this Yoga Day mark the beginning of Yoga for humanity 2.0 where inner peace becomes global policy**
>
> -Narendra Modi, Prime Minister



Yoga must in Odisha school curriculum

BHUBANESWAR, 21 JUNE

Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Saturday said the state government is taking initiatives to include yoga in the school curriculum and public health programme to create a healthy, self-reliant and efficient India. Awareness campaigns on yoga are organised in schools, colleges, hostels and sporting centres to teach people to keep their body and active.

50,000 affected by flash flood in Odisha

BALASORE, 21 JUNE

Flash floods caused by torrential rainfall in neighbouring Jharkhand have impacted thousands in Odisha's Balasore district and Bihar's Nalanda district, prompting large-scale relief and rescue operations.

In Odisha, over 50,000 people were affected after water from the Subarnarekha River entered villages in 17 gram-panchayat areas across the blocks of Bhograi, Baliapal, Basta, and part of Jaleswar Notified Area Council. The flooding resulted from a sudden release of water from the Chandil Dam in Jharkhand.

The Balasore district administration has mobilised resources, instructing officials to stay alert and prepare for evacuations. Residents in low-lying areas have been advised to move to cyclone shelters if conditions worsen. Distribution of dry food, stockpiling of essential medicines, and continuous monitoring of water levels have been initiated. The water level at Rajghat stood at 11.9 metres, above the danger mark of 10.36 metres, though it is reportedly receding.

In Bihar, several areas in Nalanda district are facing a flood-like situation after the Falgu River swelled. A sharp rise in water levels prompted the release of 73,000 cusecs from the Uderasthan Barrage, damaging small dams and affecting nearby villages. There is no immediate risk of a major flood. *—PTI*

A low-lying area flooded by water from swollen Subarnarekha river, at a village in Balasore district, Odisha *PHOTO: PTI*

Amarnath yatra: Rajnath reviews J&K security

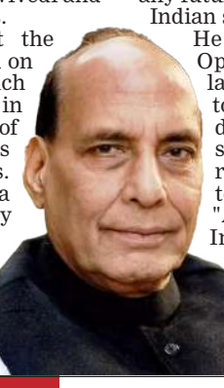
JAMMU, 21 JUNE

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh received a comprehensive briefing from top military officials on the security situation in Jammu and Kashmir, with a focus on border areas and preparations for the upcoming Amarnath Yatra. The meeting, held at the Udhampur-based Northern Command headquarters, included Chief of Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi and other senior officers.

Singh arrived at the Northern Command on 20 June, during which he also participated in International Day of Yoga celebrations with 2,500 soldiers. Following the yoga session, military leaders updated Singh on security measures in both border and hinterland regions, particularly regarding anti-terrorist operations in forested areas. The discussion also centred on the 38-day Amarnath Yatra, commencing on 3 July, for which multi-tier security arrangements have been deployed, including combing operations in the vicinity of the traditional Pahalgam and Baltal routes.

In a separate address to the troops, Singh warned Pakistan of serious consequences for any future terrorist attacks on Indian soil.

He affirmed that Operation Sindoor, launched in response to recent terror incidents, is ongoing and signifies India's resolve to counter terrorism decisively. "Any terror attack on Indian soil will prove disastrous for Pakistan," he asserted. *– PTI*



ICMR launches national rare blood donor registry

NEW DELHI, 21 JUNE

The National Institute of Immunohaematology in Mumbai, under the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), has established India's first national 'rare blood donor registry' to assist patients with rare blood types, particularly those suffering from conditions like thalassemia and sickle cell disease. The ICMR is currently liaising with the Director General of Health Services (DGHS) to integrate the registry with e-Raktakosh, an existing platform that provides information on blood availability.

With over 4,000 licensed blood banks across India, the need for this registry is underscored by high rates of blood-related illnesses and medical emergencies.

It will address the complexities involved in sourcing rare blood types, enhancing support for approximately 1.5 lakh thalassemia patients requiring frequent transfusions. Blood banks can maintain stocks effectively. *—PTI*

- The ICMR is currently liaising with the Director General of Health Services to integrate the registry with existing platfotm, e-Raktakosh.

IMPROVED SANITATION

Bihar's 'toilet clinic' restores dignity

NEW DELHI, 21 JUNE

In a small village in Bihar's Muzaffarpur district, a unique clinic led by women is healing lives in an unexpected way.

The 'Toilet Clinic' in Bishanpur Baghnagari is the first of its kind, offering repair and restoration services for broken or disused toilets. Operated entirely by local women, the clinic is restoring both sanitation and dignity in the village.

It was set up in 2024 under the leadership of Mukhiya (village headwoman) Babita Kumari, after it discovered that 190 of the 1,269 toilets built under the Swachh Bharat Mission-Grameen had fallen into disrepair.

The clinic offers affordable and repair services through local women's self-help groups supported by the Jeevika Livelihoods Mission. It is also supported by the district water and sanitation committee and UNICEF.

"When a toilet breaks, people feel ashamed to talk about it. I wanted a place where repairs could be done," Babita said.

Elected in 2021, Babita seized the opportunity to govern and reimagine what a panchayat led by women can look like.

Babita also helped revive 17 of the village's 27 dried-up wells with tree plantations adding to improved groundwater recharge.

Tap water coverage rose from 60 per cent to more than 95 per cent.

Babita introduced women-only Gram Sabhas, offering a safe space to speak.

She helped survivors of violence navigate police complaints and panchayat systems.

By mid-2024, over Rs 50,000 was generated as fees for waste service each month.

The Panchayat introduced nine composting models, tailored, branded, and now sold at Rs 15 per kg.

In 2023, Bishanpur Baghnagari was declared Muzaffarpur's first model panchayat. Babita's leadership earned her the Yashasvi Mukhiya award and a national best practice recognition. *—PTI*

DOGGOS GOT THE TALENT

A dog surfs at Huntington Beach, California, during the Purina Pro Plan Incredible Dog Challenge. Canine athletes aged 2 to 13, from Corgis to Labradors, rode waves to cheers from fans. Hoping to ride with all paws forward, these canine surfers aimed for a spot in dog-surfing history ***PHOTO: X***

Woman tries to call mom in Iran, robot answers phone

When Ellie, a British-Iranian woman living in the UK, dialled her mother in Tehran recently, she was met not with a familiar voice but a robotic one. "Alo? Alo?" it said, followed by imperfect English: "Who is calling? I can't heard you. Who you want to speak with? I'm Alyssia. Do you remember me?"

Ellie is one of nine Iranians living abroad — in the UK, US and beyond — who say they've encountered strange, disconcerting robotic voices when trying to call loved ones in Iran. The phenomenon began after Israel launched a wave of airstrikes targeting Iranian nuclear and military facilities last week.

Shared recordings reviewed by the Associated Press reveal pre-recorded, chatbot-like responses, mostly in English, with some in Farsi. Experts say they may be examples of low-tech artificial intelligence, chatbots, or automated diversions of foreign calls. What remains unclear is who is responsible — though four out of five analysts believe the Iranian government is likely behind it. One suggested Israel could be involved.

The calls are particularly distressing for Iranians in the diaspora, already struggling to reach loved ones due to a nationwide internet blackout imposed by Tehran. The blackout, officials say, is for national security, but it has also severed communication channels at a time of escalating violence. Iran has responded to Israeli strikes with hundreds of missiles and drones, and fear grips the country.

"I don't know why they're doing this," said Ellie, whose mother is diabetic and running low on insulin. Unable to call her directly, Ellie cannot even warn her to evacuate from the increasingly dangerous outskirts of Tehran.

A request for comment to Iran's UN mission has gone unanswered.

Other Iranians have reported hearing similarly bizarre or eerie recordings. A woman in New York described the same robotic female voice that greeted Ellie. "Calling your mum and hearing an AI voice is one of the scariest things I've ever experienced," she said. "I can feel it in my body."

Protesters hold Palestinian flags and march during a protest against Israel's airstrikes in Iran outside the US Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia ***PHOTO: PTI***

One woman in the UK received an even stranger message while trying to contact her mother: "Thank you for taking the time to listen. Life is full of unexpected surprises... Sometimes they bring joy, sometimes they challenge us." Another got a message that sounded like a guided meditation: "Close your eyes and picture yourself in a place that brings you peace... the seashore, the forest..."

Not everyone encounters a robotic voice — for some, calls simply ring endlessly with no answer.

The purpose behind the robotic messages is uncertain. Some, like former Twitter policy vice president Colin Crowell, believe Iranian telecom companies may be diverting international calls to a default system. Amir Rashidi, a US-based Iranian cybersecurity expert, said it likely reflects a government strategy to block calls, possibly to counter foreign hacking attempts or misinformation campaigns. He added that, early in Israel's campaign, mass texts and voice messages were sent within Iran urging the public to brace for "emergency conditions" — a tactic reminiscent of the Iran-Iraq war era.

"These messages fit the pattern of how the Iranian government has handled emergency communications in the past," said Rashidi, director of the Texas-based Miaan Group, which monitors digital rights in the Middle East.

Iran's telecommunications infrastructure is tightly controlled by the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology, with its intelligence services long suspected of monitoring private calls. Mehdi Yahyanejad, a tech entrepreneur and internet freedom activist, noted that while it is technically possible that Israel is responsible, he doubts they have a reason to stage such a campaign.

However, Marwa Fatafta, a Berlin-based advocate for digital rights at Access Now, disagrees. She suggests it could be "a form of psychological warfare by the Israelis," aligning with Israel's past use of direct messaging during conflicts in Gaza and with Hezbollah. She described the robotic voices as part of a campaign "tormenting" an already anxious Iranian diaspora.

Neither the Israeli military nor the Prime Minister's Office responded to requests for comment.

In the face of blackout and confusion, some families are finding creative workarounds. Ellie, for instance, is managing to speak to her mother via a contact near the Iran-Turkey border who owns two phones — one with a Turkish SIM and another with an Iranian one. Calls within Iran still work, so he calls Ellie's mother on one phone and holds it up to the Turkish phone connected to Ellie, allowing mother and daughter to talk. "When we told her about the AI voice answering the calls, she was shocked," said Ellie. "She said her phone hasn't rung at all." *—PTI*

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR

As UN turns 80, its aid work faces a clouded future

In the sprawling Kakuma refugee camp in northern Kenya, 41-year-old Aujene Cimanimpaye and her nine children wait patiently as lentils and sorghum are served. Born in Congo and displaced by violence in 2007, Cimanimpaye has lived on United Nations aid for nearly two decades. "We cannot go back home because people are still being killed," she says.

Kakuma is home to over 3,00,000 refugees, with the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and UN refugee agency (UNHCR) providing essential support. Cimanimpaye's family recently moved from Uganda's Nakivale Refugee Settlement, joining more than a million refugees now sheltering in Kenya from conflict-ridden East African countries.

A few kilometres away in Kalobeyei settlement, Bahati Musaba, a Congolese mother of five, reflects on how life has changed since 2016. "UN agencies have supported my children's education — we get food, water, medicine and even cash support from WFP," she says. But this year, much of that assistance has halted. With aid activities scaled back and cash transfers stopped, the future for millions like Musaba now hangs in the balance.

As the UN marks its 80th anniversary, its humanitarian arm faces one of the gravest crises in its history. Funding cuts, notably from the United States under the Trump administration, have severely weakened agencies such as WFP and UNHCR, which once relied on the US for at least 40% of their budgets. The US slashed foreign aid spending by roughly $60 billion, while other Western donors have similarly redirected funds towards national defence.

The result: thousands of jobs cut across UN agencies and widespread revision of aid programmes. "It's too brutal what has happened," said Jan Egeland, a former UN humanitarian chief and current head of the Norwegian Refugee Council. "It has forced us to make priorities ... I hope we will shift more of our resources to the front lines and have fewer people sitting in offices talking about the problem."

Humanitarian workers often risk their lives to serve the world's most vulnerable — from slums tracking emerging viruses to drought zones distributing clean water. The year 2024 was the deadliest on record for UN humanitarian staff, largely due to the war in Gaza. Operations in Yemen's Houthi-held areas were suspended in February following detentions of dozens of aid workers.

UN agencies are reportedly turning against each other, competing for a shrinking pool of donor funds ***PHOTO: PTI***

Internally, UN agencies are reportedly turning against each other, competing for a shrinking pool of donor funds. A senior diplomat from a major donor nation, speaking anonymously, said tensions are mounting as organisations fight over limited resources.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres has called for drastic reform, including a 20% staff reduction across agencies. While many agree reform is overdue, critics argue the deeper crisis lies in the growing gap between escalating humanitarian needs and declining contributions.

Long celebrated for helping to defeat smallpox, provide food in famine zones, and house the displaced in war-torn regions like Syria, Sudan and Venezuela, the UN's humanitarian legacy now appears fragile. Critics say some programmes have become bloated and bureaucratic, often disconnected from frontline realities. They also claim prolonged aid can foster dependency and corruption, particularly in countries where systemic development remains elusive.

The crisis is starkest in the World Food Programme, which is cutting 25 per ecnt of its 22,000 staff. "This year, we've estimated around 343 million acutely food insecure people," said WFP Deputy Executive Director Carl Skau. "That's a threefold increase from four years ago. And this year, our funding is dropping 40 per cent, the equation doesn't add up."

UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, has also suffered dramatically. Since 1948, it has provided food, education, healthcare and employment in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. But the United States — its largest donor — halted funding over accusations from Israel that the agency fosters anti-Israel sentiment and allows Hamas to divert aid. UNRWA denies the allegations but now struggles to maintain basic services.

"UNRWA is like one of the foundations of your home. If you remove it, everything falls apart," says Issa Haj Hassan, a Palestinian diabetic in Beirut whose family depends on the agency for medication and support. Single mother Ibtisam Salem, also in Beirut, shares a one-room flat with relatives and says: "If it wasn't for UNRWA, we would die of starvation."

Beyond funding, politics increasingly obstruct humanitarian work. The Security Council remains paralysed over wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, diminishing the UN's diplomatic effectiveness. Meanwhile, alternative aid channels, such as the controversial Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, are emerging — but often without the capacity or neutrality of the UN.

Other international partnerships like GAVI (vaccines) and the Global Fund (HIV, TB, malaria) have also felt the impact of US aid cuts. Despite hopes that countries like China or oil-rich Gulf nations might fill the void, no new donor has stepped in at scale.

The future of UN humanitarian work depends, ultimately, on political will. "We need to take that debate back into our countries, into our capitals," said Achim Steiner, head of the UN Development Programme.

"Because it is there that you either empower the UN to act and succeed — or you paralyse it." *—PTI*

Moving from halls to homes, classical music finds new audiences

In an era of overstimulation, where attention is short and moments pass in blinks, a quiet musical revolution is taking shape, not in grand auditoriums, but in intimate living rooms. Indian classical music, once the preserve of connoisseurs and closed circles, is finding new audiences in personal, immersive gatherings known as baithaks.

These intimate concerts, often held in private homes, are reviving the spirit of the mehfil — traditional gatherings centred around soulful performances. They are attracting not just seasoned listeners but the "music curious," offering a fresh lease of life to an art form that long remained behind closed doors.

The movement draws inspiration from music pioneers like Vishnu Digambar Paluskar and Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande, who once envisioned a more inclusive landscape for classical music. Now, that vision is being realised — one living room at a time.

In South Delhi, EduTech consultant Sukanya Banerjee and fitness educator Tejas Jaishankar launched 'Evening Raag' in 2018, charging Rs 200 for a performance by an aspiring artist in front of 25 attendees. Five years later, their initiative, now rebranded as Upstairs With Us, sees guests paying Rs 2,000 to enjoy carefully curated performances in a cosy setting.

People enjoy an evening of Indian classical music at 'Upstairs With Us', in New Delhi ***PHOTO: PTI***

"Our aim is to create a paying audience that values the art, and in doing so, ensure fair compensation to artistes," Jaishankar said. "Most performing spaces are insular. The same people see the same artistes every weekend, the reach was limited."

By charging Rs 2,000 per ticket and accommodating around 30 guests, Upstairs With Us can pay artistes between Rs 15,000 and Rs 20,000, alongside a home-cooked meal. "It's about breaking barriers and offering a space where no one feels out of place," added Jaishankar, himself a classically trained vocalist.

For tabla player Zuheb Ahmed Khan, a regular performer at Upstairs, the shift is welcome. "You don't have to be Tansen, but if you become kaansen — someone who appreciates music — that's enough," he said. Most artistes, he added, earn just Rs 5,000-6,000 per performance. "So Rs 10,000-15,000 is a good amount. More than money, it's the respect and connection that matter."

In Old Delhi, the Kathika Cultural Centre in Gali Khatikan, Sitaram Bazaar, has taken on a similar mission since opening in 2023. Founded by Atul Khanna, Kathika aims to revive the living traditions of Shahjahanabad through deeply immersive baithaks.

"These gatherings are inspired by the mehfil tradition — close interactions between audiences, artists, historians and communities," said Khanna. "Our audience is incredibly diverse: students, scholars, connoisseurs, travellers and long-time residents of Old Delhi."

Kathika focuses on authenticity over celebrity appeal, hosting performers like Nischal Zaveri and Rene Singh. Ticket prices begin at Rs 500. "The younger generation craves something real and culturally enriching. These intimate performances meet that need," Khanna noted.

Meanwhile, 'Once Upon India', founded by Shiva Sureka, Malini Arora, and Arpita Sharma in 2023, takes the baithak experience to the audience — quite literally. Their model involves curating a music experience and announcing it via Instagram. If someone volunteers to host, the group brings in the artiste, sound system, seating, décor, and high-tea — all at no cost to the host. Tickets begin at Rs 4,000.

"We decode songs, add cultural context, and make the experience emotionally resonant," said Sharma. In just two years, they have hosted 40 baithaks and five mehfils, featuring everyone from young Manganiyar artists from Barmer to Sufi musicians from AR Rahman's team.

"The audience has always been there — curious, respectful, eager — but they lacked access. We're opening that door," Sharma added.

Ibtida – 'Ek Mehfil', another notable platform, was launched in 2019 by Tanvi Singh Bhatia and Anubhav Jain. Their aim: to revive old-world nostalgia and celebrate all things Indian in an intimate setup.

"The idea was to move away from the mass concerts and reconnect the artist and audience," said Bhatia. Ibtida has hosted icons like Hariharan, Usha Uthup, Rekha Bhardwaj, and Papon. Their upcoming baithak in Mumbai on 9 July — featuring Tech Panda, Kenzani, Hindustani vocalists, and dancers — is priced from Rs 3,500 per ticket.

As these new platforms flourish in cities like Delhi and Mumbai, the classical arts are slowly becoming more accessible, not just to listeners, but also to performers.

"Culture shouldn't stay confined," said Sharma. "It should be shared, and we're simply creating a space where that can happen beautifully — without losing its essence."

On this World Music Day, Indian classical music is no longer confined to dusty archives or echoing halls. It's alive in living rooms, breathing through ragas and taals, touching hearts one baithak at a time. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Panama suspends constitutional rights during strike

PANAMA CITY, 20 JUNE

Panama has suspended constitutional protections for five days in Bocas del Toro province following two months of escalating protests and destructive road blockades. Presidential Minister Juan Carlos Orillac stated the move aims to restore order and address threats posed by "radical groups." What began as nationwide protests against social security system reforms quickly turned more violent, culminating in damage to the local airport and Chiquita Brands facilities, which had recently dismissed thousands of workers. President José Raúl Mulino deemed the banana workers' strike illegal. The unrest intensified as vandals targeted the airport in Changuinola. The government previously declared a state of emergency in the province. *—PTI*

Connecticut teen pleads guilty in $245M Bitcoin heist

CONNECTICUT, 21 JUNE

A 19-year-old from Connecticut, Veer Chetal, pleaded guilty to fraud and money laundering in connection with a staggering $245 million Bitcoin theft. Court documents revealed that Chetal, part of a trio accused of stealing 4,100 Bitcoins from a Washington, DC victim last August, has agreed to testify against his co-defendants. Following the heist, Chetal's parents were briefly kidnapped in a failed ransom attempt. Prosecutors allege he was involved in around 50 similar scams, netting an additional $3 million between late 2023 and September 2024. Facing a potential 19 to 24 years in prison, Chetal could also face deportation due to his criminal record. Federal agents recovered approximately $500,000 in cash and high-value assets from his properties. *—PTI*

Suicide bomber kills 10 in Nigerian restaurant

ABUJA, 21 JUNE

A suicide bomber in Nigeria's northeast state of Borno killed at least 10 people and injured several others in an explosion in a restaurant, police said Saturday. The blast occurred in the Konduga area late Friday, police spokesperson Nahum Daso told The Associated Press. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack, but Nigeria's northeast has been hit by attacks carried out by Islamic militants from the Boko Haram group and its splinter, the Islamic State West Africa Province. Boko Haram, Nigeria's homegrown jihadis, took up arms in 2009 to fight Western education and impose their radical version of Islamic law. *—PTI*

Frenchman booked for online sex racket in Columbia

PARIS, 21 JUNE

A 55-year-old Frenchman suspected of commissioning online pedophile crimes in Colombia has been arrested and charged in France, the Paris prosecutor's office said on Saturday. The suspect was charged this week with complicity in human trafficking involving minors under the age of 15 who had been raped, rape and sexual assault of minors including incestuous acts, as well as acquisition, possession and consultation of pornographic images of minors. He was remanded in custody. The suspect had allegedly transferred more than 30,000 euros (USD 35,000) to several people in Colombia in exchange for images of young children being sexually abused, the prosecutor's office said. Weapons were also found at the individual's home, police officials said. *—PTI*

Israeli air defense system fires to intercept missiles during an Iranian attack over Tel Aviv, Israel
PHOTO: PTI

Israel bombs another Iranian nuke facility

IDF kills Hamas leader behind 7 Oct attack

TEL AVIV, 21 JUNE

Israel's military said Saturday it struck an Iranian nuclear research facility overnight and killed three senior Iranian commanders in targeted attacks as the war between the two nations continued into a second week.

Israel's target was two centrifuge production sites, and the attacks came on top of strikes on other centrifuge production sites elsewhere in recent days, according to an Israeli military official.

It was the second attack on Isfahan, which was hit in the first 24 hours of the war as part of Israel's goal to destroy the Iranian nuclear program.

Akbar Salehi, Isfahan province's Deputy Governor for Security Affairs, confirmed the Israeli strikes had caused damage to the facility but said there had been no human casualties.

The Israel's targeted killings of senior commanders continued, with Israel's Defence Minister saying that the military had killed Saeed Izadi, a commander in Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard who financed and armed Hamas in preparation for the 7 October attack on Israel.

Saeed Izadi
Photo: X

Israel also said it had killed the commander of the Quds Force's weapons transfer unit, who it said was responsible for providing weapons to Hezbollah and Hamas. Behnam Shahriyari was killed in his car in western Iran, the military said.

Iran launched a new wave of drones and missiles at Israel but there were no immediate reports of significant damage, and the Israeli official called it a "small barrage" that was largely intercepted by Israel's defences.

The official said part of the reason that Iran's attack was relatively small was that the military had been targeting its launchers, and estimates it has now taken out more than 50 per cent of them. *—PTI*

Iran's talks in Switzerland fail to produce breakthrough

The ongoing fighting comes after talks in Geneva on Friday failed to produce a diplomatic breakthrough. European officials expressed hope for future discussions, and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said he was open to further dialogue. "Iran is ready to consider diplomacy if aggression ceases and the aggressor is held accountable for its committed crimes," he reitterated. No date was set for the next round of talks, as Iran continued to warn US against interfering in the war.

Iran threatens head of UN nuclear watchdog

The head of the UN nuclear watchdog warned at an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council against attacks on Iran's nuclear reactors, particularly its only commercial nuclear power plant in the southern city of Bushehr. Leaders in Iran have blamed Rafael Grossi's statements about Iran's nuclear program for prompting Israel's attack. On Saturday, a senior adviser for Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamanei, Ali Larijani, said in a brief social media post without elaboration that Iran would make Grossi "pay" once the war is over.

Putin says Russia shared peace proposals with Israel & Iran

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Friday that he has reached out to both sides to try to end the week-old war. Putin said Russia has proposed "some ideas" for a possible settlement between Iran and Israel. He said Moscow asked Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to ensure the security of Russian personnel who are working to construct two more reactors at the nuclear power plant in Iran's port of Bushehr and that he also raised the issue with US President Donald Trump. "Netanyahu has agreed with that, and Trump has promised to support our legitimate demands," Putin said. But he strongly rejected allegations that Moscow has failed to back its ally, Tehran, saying the Kremlin has maintained good ties with both Iran and Israel.

GABBARD WRONG, ISRAELI STRIKES HARD TO STOP: TRUMP

WASHINGTON, 21 JUNE

US President Donald Trump has said that his Director of National Intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard, was "wrong" when she previously said that Iran wasn't building a nuclear weapon. He suggested that it would be "very hard to stop" Israel's strikes in order to negotiate a possible ceasefire.

Trump was asked about Gabbard's comments to Congress in March. He responded, "Well then, my intelligence community is wrong."

In a subsequent post on X, Gabbard said her testimony was taken out of context. "America has intelligence that Iran is at the point that it can produce a nuclear weapon within weeks to months, if they decide to finalise the assembly".

Trump said that, while he might support a ceasefire, Israel is "very hard to stop.

"Israel's doing well. Iran is doing less well. It's a little bit hard to get somebody to stop (when they're winning)," *—PTI*

Federal court lets Harvard host international students

WASHINGTON, 21 JUNE

A federal judge has blocked the Trump administration's efforts to keep Harvard University from hosting international students, delivering the Ivy League school another victory as it challenges multiple government sanctions amid a battle with the White House.

The Friday's order from US District Judge Allison Burroughs in Boston preserves Harvard's ability to host foreign students while the case is decided, but it falls short of resolving all of Harvard's legal hurdles to hosting international students.

Notably, Burroughs said the federal government still has authority to review Harvard's ability to host international students through normal processes outlined in law.

Harvard sued the Department of Homeland Security in May after the agency abruptly withdrew the school's certification to host foreign students and issue paperwork for their visas, skirting most of its usual procedures.

The action would have forced Harvard's roughly 7,000 international students — about a quarter of its total enrolment — to transfer or risk being in the US illegally. New foreign students would have been barred from coming to Harvard.

Trump had, in early June, issued a proclamation to block foreign students from entering the US to attend Harvard, citing a different legal justification. Although Burroughs had temporarily blocked Trump's proclamation, she did not address the proclamation in her order Friday. *—PTI*

Vance blames California officials for LA 'violence'

LOS ANGELES, 21 JUNE

Vice President JD Vance on Friday accused California Governor Gavin Newsom and Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass of inciting violent immigration protests. Vance's remarks came during his visit to Los Angeles.

In a controversial statement, Vance mistakenly referred to US Senator Alex Padilla as "Jose Padilla," referencing a convicted terrorist. This comment drew backlash, with Padilla's spokesperson, Tess Oswald, urging Vance to focus on demilitarising the city.

Vance claimed that the actions of Newsom and Bass, who he labelled as "sanctuary city" leaders, created an "open season" for rioters against law enforcement. In response, Bass called Vance's assertions "lies," emphasising her city's efforts to maintain peace amid federal immigration sweeps that sparked violent protests. *—PTI*

Columbia protester Mahmoud Khalil freed from ICE detention

Palestinian activist Mahmoud Khalil was released Friday from federal immigration detention, freed by a judge's ruling after becoming a symbol of President Donald Trump's clampdown on campus protests. The former Columbia University graduate student left a federal facility in Louisiana on Friday. He is expected to head to New York to reunite with his US citizen wife and newborn son. Held for over three months, Khalil was released after US District Judge Michael Farbiarz said it would be "highly, highly unusual" for the government to continue detaining a legal US resident who was unlikely to flee and hadn't been accused of any violence.

Don't want Ukraine's surrender: Putin

ST PETERSBURG, 21 JUNE

- Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Russian and Ukrainians are 'one people' and demanded that the worlds recognised 'the realities that have developed

In a plenary session at the St Petersburg International Economic Forum, Russian President Vladimir Putin asserted that Russia is not demanding Ukraine's unconditional surrender but seeks recognition of "realities" on the ground amid ongoing conflict. He stated, "We insist on recognition of the realities that have developed." While he reiterated his view that Russians and Ukrainians are "one people," he expressed hesitance about the legitimacy of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to negotiate peace, emphasising the need for signatures from "legitimate authorities."

Simultaneously, Putin cautioned that Afghanistan's instability poses serious threats to the member states of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), which includes Russia and several Central Asian nations. He highlighted the risk of terrorist groups exploiting the situation to infiltrate CSTO countries and urged enhanced coordination, border security, and intelligence-sharing.

Putin stressed that only an inclusive Afghan government could effectively address extremist challenges. *—ANI*

In the 1980s, an Air Force colonel was officially tasked with planting disinformation ***PHOTO: X***

US MILITARY FUELLED UFO MYTHOLOGY TO MASK CLASSIFIED MISSIONS

After months of investigating conspiracy theories about UFO missions, Pentagon found one such theories, from 1980s, to be a brainchild of itself

HERE'S WHAT HAPPENED:

- An Air Force colonel went to a bar near Nevada's Area 51 and shared a photo of flying saucers.
- Local myth spread quickly that US military was secretly testing recovered alien technology in Area 51.
- In 2023, the same colonel, now retired, confessed the truth about Area 51 to Pentagon. He said the rumour was to mask the actual use of Area 51 – development of secret stealth fighter F-117 Nighthawk. The weapon was crucial during Cold War, for surveillance of Soviet Union.
- This was one of many incidents, where agencies fueled UFO myths to protect military assets.

OTHER FINDINGS OF THE PENTAGON REPORT CALLED ALL-DOMAIN ANOMALY RESOLUTION OFFICE (AARO):

- Pentagon withheld information from witnesses who saw classified military tests.
- It confirmed several well-known UFO rumours were seeded to distract the public and foreign adversaries from ongoing aircraft development.
- Air Force officers routinely gave new recruits fake briefings about "Yankee Blue", a unit that investigated alien spacecraft. Recruits were given strict orders to never reveal this.
- Eyewitnesses such as former Air Force captain Robert Salas were misled. In 1967, he claimed to have seen a UFO over a Montana nuclear site, but was ordered to remain silent.

RESEARCH: SAARIYAH IRAM

'FRAGILE AND HOPEFUL'

2M displaced Syrians face tough future: UN

DAMASCUS, 21 JUNE

UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi said on Friday that more than two million Syrian refugees and internally displaced people have returned home since the fall of Bashar Assad's government in December.

Speaking on World Refugee Day, Grandi in Damascus described the situation as "fragile and hopeful" and warned that the returnees may not stay if Syria does not get more international assistance to rebuild.

Grandi, interacting with a small group of journalists said that while it was a good sign that people were returning, it was important that they were provided with essential facilities like electricity, schools and health centres so they don't leave again.

Syria's near 14-year civil war killed nearly half a million people and displaced half the country's pre-war population of 23 million.

Grandi said that 600,000 Syrians have returned to the country since Assad's fall, and about another 1.5 million internally displaced people returned to their homes in the same period.

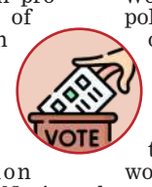
However, there is little aid available for the returnees, with multiple crises in the region -- including the new Israel-Iran war -- and shrinking support from donors.

"I tell the Europeans in particular, be careful. Remember 2015, 2016 when they cut food assistance to the Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan, the Syrians moved toward Europe," Grandi said. *—PTI*

No elections without govt support: B'desh EC chief

DHAKA, 21 JUNE

The government plays a central role in the election process, the head of Bangladesh's Election Commission said on Saturday, asserting that holding polls is "not possible" without its support.



Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin said that no matter "how independent" the election body is said to be, "it is not possible to hold an election without the government's support.

"We have to conduct the polls with the cooperation of the government," the Dhaka Tribune newspaper quoted him as saying.

"We do have an operational plan -- though I wouldn't call it a roadmap," he said, responding to a question on when the elections would be held. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Govt launches ₹2.3 cr startup solar scheme

NEW DELHI, 21 JUNE

The Ministry of New & Renewable Energy (MNRE) on Saturday announced the launch of a Rs 2.3-crore startup innovation challenge with an aim to accelerate rooftop solar installation and renewable energy adoption in the country. It is being implemented under aegis of MNRE with support from National Institute of Solar Energy, and in coordination with StartUp India, DPIIT. Winners will get incubation support, pilot implementation opportunities, & mentorship from domain experts and investors, facilitated by MNRE & NISE. Deadline for submitting entries is 20 August and the winners will be announced on 10 September. Applications can be submitted through the startup India's Website: https://www.startupindia.gov.in. *—PTI*

CBI books ex-Tata officials in 800 cr port scam

NEW DELHI, 21 JUNE

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has filed a case against former officials of Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT), Tata Consulting Engineers (TCE), and two dredging firms over alleged irregularities worth over Rs 800 crore in the Capital Dredging Project near Mumbai. The FIR names ex-JNPT chief engineer Sunil Kumar Madabhavi, former TCE project director Devdutt Bose, Boskalis Smit India LLP, Jan De Nul Dredging India Pvt Ltd, and others. CBI alleges a criminal conspiracy involving inflated costs, favoured foreign bidders, overpayments, and fake claims. Raids in Mumbai & Chennai recovered project documents and digital evidence. The alleged offences span 2003–2019 & caused losses of over Rs 800 crore. *—PTI*

India Cements to sell Industrial Chemicals

NEW DELHI, 21 JUNE

India Cements Ltd (ICL), owned by the Aditya Birla group, on Saturday said it will sell its subsidiary Industrial Chemicals and Monomers to Mirai Sensing. The board of company has approved the sale with a consideration of Rs 97.68 crore, ICL said. The company shall enter into an agreement with Mirai Sensing Pvt Ltd, proposed buyer, upon finalisation of terms, it said. It expects the sale to be completed within six months from date of agreement. UltraTech, country's leading cement maker, in December last year acquired the promoter's stake in south-based cement maker. ICL became a subsidiary of UltraTech Cement with effect from 24 December, 2024.*—PTI*

NTPC board okays raising Rs 18K cr via bonds, NCDs

NEW DELHI, 21 JUNE

State-run power giant NTPC board on Saturday approved proposal to raise up to Rs 18,000 crore through issuance of non-convertible debentures (NCDs) or bonds on private placement in domestic market. The board of directors of the company in its meeting on Saturday also considered and approved the draft notice of postal ballot in respect of seeking approval of shareholders of the company for issue of these NCDs, as per a regulatory filing. According to the filing, the board approved the issue of NCDs up to Rs 18,000 crore in one or more tranches/series not exceeding 12, through private placement in the domestic market during the period commencing from the date of passing of special resolution till completion of one year.*—PTI*

Net direct tax collection dips 1.39% to Rs 4.59L cr

NEW DELHI, 21 JUNE

India's gross direct tax collections for the financial year 2025–26 rose by 4.86 per cent to ₹5.45 lakh crore as of 19 June, compared to Rs 5.19 lakh crore collected in the same period last year, according to figures released by the Income Tax Department.

However, net direct tax collections fell by 1.39 per cent to Rs 4.59 lakh crore, largely due to a 58 per cent surge in tax refunds, which amounted to Rs 86,385 crore. The increase in refunds reflects faster processing and improved taxpayer services.

Advance tax collections during 1 April to 19 June 2025 showed a muted growth of 3.87 per cent, totalling ₹1.56 lakh crore, a sharp slowdown from the 27 per cent growth recorded during the same period in 2024. Within this:

Corporate advance tax rose by 5.86 per cent to ₹1.22 lakh crore.

Non-corporate advance tax (largely personal income tax) declined by 2.68 per cent to Rs 33,928 crore.

Overall corporate tax collections stood at ₹1.73 lakh crore, registering a decline of over 5 per cent year-on-year. Non-corporate tax collections inched up by 0.7 per cent to Rs 2.73 lakh crore. Securities Transaction Tax (STT) collections rose by 12 per cent, amounting to Rs 13,013 crore.

- Overall corporate tax collections stood at ₹1.73 lakh crore, registering a decline of over 5 per cent year-on-year. Non-corporate tax collections inched up by 0.7 per cent to ₹2.73 lakh crore.

To enhance ease of compliance, the Income Tax Department has introduced a new 'e-Pay Tax' facility on its portal. Meanwhile, the government is reviewing the Income-tax Act of 1961 to simplify provisions and reduce litigation.

A draft Income Tax Bill, 2025 is under scrutiny by a Select Committee, with discussions expected in the monsoon session of Parliament.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman previously announced that under the revised regime, individuals earning up to Rs 12 lakh per annum will have no tax liability, thanks to an increased rebate of ₹60,000. *—PTI*

To enhance ease of compliance, the Income Tax Department has introduced a new 'e-Pay Tax' facility on its portal PHOTO: X

Foreign investors infuse Rs 1,209 cr in mkt: NSDL

Net outflow in June stands at Rs 4,192 crore

MUMBAI, 21 JUNE

Foreign investment in the Indian equity market remained positive during the week from 16 June to 20 June, though the net inflows declined compared to the previous week, as per the latest data released by the National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL).

According to the data, foreign investors made net inflows worth Rs 1,209 crore in Indian equities this week. The inflows were largely supported by significant buying activity on Wednesday and Friday.

Market experts attributed this trend to foreign participation in several block deals offered during the week, along with notable inflows on Friday due to the FTSE rebalancing.

Siddhartha Khemka, Head Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services told ANI "FPI inflows this week has been driven by buying seen in several blocks offered during the week as well as large inflows on Friday due to FTSE rebalancing. Overall Indian economy stands strong driven by healthy economic growth multi year low inflation, rate cut by RBI as well as prospects of a above normal monsoon".

The inflows were largely supported by significant buying activity on Wednesday and Friday PHOTO: X

Despite the positive movement this week, foreign portfolio investment (FPI) flows for the month of June so far continue to remain in the negative.

As of 20 June, the net outflows by foreign investors stood at Rs 4,192 crore. However, this is an improvement from the previous week (ending 13 June), when net outflows were higher at Rs 5,402 crore. This reduction in outflows reflects some signs of stabilization in FPI sentiment.

Khemka added that the recent inflows are being driven by India's strong economic fundamentals. These factors are collectively boosting investor confidence and encouraging selective foreign investment, even amid global uncertainties.

Key global triggers include geopolitical developments, fluctuations in crude oil prices amid tensions in middle east, and the approaching deadline for the imposition of US reciprocal tariffs. *—ANI*

JUMPS TO $698.950B

India's forex reserves nearing a record high

NEW DELHI, 21 JUNE

PHOTO: FREEPIK

India's foreign exchange reserves have experienced a significant rise, increasing by USD 2.294 billion to reach USD 698.950 billion for the week ending 13 June, according to official data released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

During the recent monetary policy meeting, RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra reported that the nation's forex reserves are adequate to cover 11 months of imports and approximately 96 per cent of external debt. With this latest increase, the reserves are approaching their all-time peak of USD 704.89 billion, which was recorded in September 2024.

The RBI's data indicates that India's foreign currency assets, the major component of the overall reserves, amount to USD 589.426 billion. Notably, central banks globally, including India, are increasingly incorporating gold into their foreign exchange reserves, with the RBI's gold share nearly doubling since 2021.

Foreign exchange reserves are critical assets held by a nation's central bank, primarily in reserve currencies like the US Dollar, and also include smaller portions in the Euro, Japanese Yen, and Pound Sterling. The RBI actively manages liquidity and intervenes in the currency market to mitigate steep depreciation of the Indian Rupee, buying dollars when the currency is strong and selling when it weakens. *—ANI*

ICICI offered to acquire HDFC: Parekh

NEW DELHI, 21 JUNE

Veteran banker and former HDFC Ltd chairman Deepak Parekh have revealed that ICICI Bank once offered to acquire mortgage lender HDFC Ltd, but he declined the proposal. Speaking during a YouTube conversation with former ICICI Bank CEO Chanda Kochhar, Parekh recalled her saying, "ICICI started HDFC. Why don't you come back home?"

Interestingly, HDFC Ltd was originally supported financially by ICICI Ltd, the precursor to ICICI Bank. However, Parekh turned down the offer, citing concerns over fairness and the importance of preserving HDFC's independent identity.

Eventually, HDFC Ltd merged with its banking subsidiary HDFC Bank in a reverse merger that took effect on 1 July, 2023. This marked the end of HDFC Ltd's 44-year legacy and created India's largest private sector bank.

- Interestingly, HDFC Ltd was originally supported financially by ICICI Ltd, the precursor to ICICI Bank. However, Parekh turned down the offer, citing concerns over fairness and the importance of preserving HDFC's independent identity.

Parekh stated that the merger was largely driven by regulatory pressure, with the Reserve Bank of India offering guidance but no concessions. He described the move as beneficial for both the institution and the country, emphasising that Indian banks must grow through consolidation to remain competitive in the future. *—PTI*

Apple in talks to acquire Perplexity AI Firm

BENGALURU, 21 JUNE

Apple is reportedly exploring its largest-ever acquisition: a potential bid for AI search startup Perplexity, according to Bloomberg's Mark Gurman. Valued at USD 14 billion, Perplexity is known for its real-time, conversational AI search engine — a platform that could significantly boost Apple's AI ambitions.

The talks, still in early stages, involve Apple's M&A head Adrian Perica, services chief Eddy Cue, and senior AI executives. While no formal offer has been made, Apple has held multiple meetings with Perplexity in recent months. Apple declined to comment, and Perplexity claims to have "no knowledge of any current or future M&A discussions."

With generative AI transforming web search, Apple risks being left behind by rivals like OpenAI, Google, and Anthropic. Perplexity would give it a consumer-ready AI product and a strong brand foothold in the space.

The move could also safeguard Apple's position if its USD 20 billion-a-year Google search deal collapses amid US antitrust scrutiny.

However, Samsung is reportedly nearing its own deal with Perplexity — a development that could pressure Apple to act swiftly. *—Agencies*

RBI eases project financing norms for banks and NBFCs, says Report

NEW DELHI, 21 JUNE

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has relaxed project financing regulations for banks and non-banking financial companies (NBFCs), a move expected to have a minimal impact on profitability and balance sheets, according to a report by Motilal Oswal.

The report suggests that while the revised norms will not affect existing loans, any additional provisioning costs for new project loans may be passed onto borrowers through yield adjustments, particularly in a declining interest rate environment.

The RBI's newly released final guidelines, known as the Reserve Bank of India (Project Finance) Directions, 2025, provide a comprehensive framework for income recognition, asset classification, and provisioning norms for project loans currently in implementation. Notably, the new rules significantly reduce provisioning requirements for banks and NBFCs; they have been lowered to just 1 per cent during construction, compared to the previously proposed 5 per cent, and as low as 0.4 per cent post Date of Commencement of Commercial Operations (DCCO). These updated regulations will take effect on 1 October this year.

PHOTO: PTI

The draft guidelines that preceded these changes aimed to offer a framework for financing project loans while addressing associated risks. The RBI received feedback from nearly 70 stakeholders, including banks, NBFCs, industry bodies, and the Central Government. The report concludes that the relaxed norms will facilitate continued project financing with negligible effects on lenders' profitability and balance sheet strength. *—ANI*

'PSU BANKS GAIN SHARE AMID SLOW CREDIT GROWTH'

NEW DELHI, 21 JUNE

According to a recent report by Union Bank of India, Public Sector Banks (PSBs) have successfully increased their market share in Indian financial sector amid a slowdown in credit growth during FY25. While overall banking credit growth has moderated, PSBs outperformed Private Sector Banks (PVBs). The report indicates that PVBs exhibited a high Credit-Deposit (CD) ratio, reflecting an aggressive lending approach, yet their incremental CD ratio significantly declined, indicating reduced new disbursements. Conversely, PSBs maintained stability in their lending strategies, particularly excelling in working capital & demand loans, which are essential for businesses. *—ANI*

'HALLUCINATION' PROBLEM

Vexoo Labs says it has a solution for AI's flaw

SINGAPORE, 21 JUNE

Most artificial intelligence systems suffer from the flaw of "hallucination" and are not meant for India's small enterprises in manufacturing sector, deep-tech company Vexoo Labs has said and claimed its AI solutions are for the "real world".

"The focus on factual accuracy is both rare and crucial," said Ajay Kumar, Senior Business Leader, AI Evangelist and a Board Advisor at Vexoo Labs.

He said most AI tools today are built for showcase, not for reliability.

According to Kumar, despite the global boom in artificial intelligence, "most systems on the market today suffer from a dangerous flaw: hallucinations — confidently delivering factually incorrect information".

Vexoo Labs focus on trustworthy AI for real-world India is already resonating across enterprise and public sector conversations PHOTO: AI

"For India's MSMEs, where decisions have direct operational and financial consequences, this isn't just a flaw, it's a liability," he added.

He said Vexoo Labs focus on trustworthy AI for real-world India is already resonating across enterprise and public sector conversations.

Furthermore, given the government's generous incentives, Indian manufacturing sector should adopt technology to become a "Silicon Valley" that attracts global sovereign funds, said Bengaluru-based industrialist-turned-investor Ankit Kedia.

However, technology must be made affordable for these cash-strapped manufacturers operating in lower-cost environments in Tier-II and Tier-III cities, he said.

Bengaluru, already recognised as a technology hub and often called India's Silicon Valley, should now focus on manufacturing, especially by leveraging advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, he suggested.

Over 7,000 participants from more than 100 countries attended the Singapore Super AI *—PTI*

No obstacle will remain in NSE IPO: SEBI chairman

MUMBAI, 21 JUNE

Tuhin Kanta Pandey, chairman of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), announced that there are currently no obstacles preventing the National Stock Exchange (NSE) from proceeding with its highly anticipated initial public offering (IPO).

Speaking at the Financial Express CFO Awards in Mumbai, Pandey refrained from providing a specific timeline regarding the IPO but assured attendees that issues related to the NSE's clearing corporation ownership are not hindering the process.

He indicated that the NSE is resolving various legal matters, including financial settlements and case withdrawals, without specifying further details. Pandey expressed optimism about expanding the domestic investor base, aiming to grow from 130 million unique investors to 400 million within the next five years.

He emphasised the importance of regulatory ease to foster economic growth, highlighting the crucial role of CFOs in ensuring financial integrity and maintaining investor trust in the market. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Vondrousova ousts Aryna Sabalenka in Berlin

PARIS, 21 JUNE

Vondrousova, the 2023 Wimbledon champion, defeated World No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka 6-2, 6-4 in their semifinal meeting at Berlin on Saturday. The Czech Vondrousova needed 1 hour and 21 minutes to level their head-to-head at four wins apiece. The unseeded left-hander is now in her first final since she won the Wimbledon title nearly two years ago. Her opponent on Sunday will be another unseeded player: either 2021 Berlin champion Liudmila Samsonova or Chinese qualifier Wang Xinyu. Top win: Despite her previous successes against Sabalenka, this is the first time Vondrousova has beaten her while she was ranked World No. 1 in the PIF WTA Rankings. It is the Czech's first career win over any reigning World No. 1.—*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Arthur Fils pulls out of tournament with injury

DUBAI, 30 OCT

French No. 1 Arthur Fils withdrew from Wimbledon on Saturday due to a back injury that forced him out of the French Open. At Roland Garros last month, the 21-year-old was forced to pull out before a third-round clash with Russia's Andrey Rublev because of a lower back stress fracture. He had required treatment during his five-set second round win over Jaume Munar for the problem on the clay in Paris. Fils, ranked 15th in the world, progressed to the last 16 at Wimbledon last year.—*PTI*

Wood hopes to be fit for fifth Test against India

LONDON, 21 JUNE

Injured England fast bowler Mark Wood hopes to be fit and available for selection ahead of the fifth and final Test against India to be played at the Oval from 31 July. Wood is currently rehabilitating following a knee surgery. The 35-year-old suffered medial ligament damage in his left knee during the Champions Trophy earlier this year, and went under the knife in March. Even though the doctors said he would be out for four months, Wood feels he will be in a position to play the fifth Test. "Rehab is going well. I've just started bowling very lightly, so I'm on the comeback trail now officially," Wood told BBC Test Match Special. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Joshi equals course record to move into top three

MARRAKECH, 21 JUNE

India's Khalin Joshi matched the course record as he shot 9-under 63 to move into third position after day two of the Morocco Rising Stars Marrakech here. Joshi, who carded 1-under 71 on the first day, is now 10-under at the Samanah Golf Club. Indian-American Varun Chopra (67-66) shared the lead with Moroccan Ayoub Lguirati (67-66) at 11-under after two rounds. Joshi made 10 birdies in his round and looked good to set a course record before he had his only bogey of the day on the 18th as his shot landed in a bunker. —*PTI*

Neeraj Chopra beats Weber to win Paris DL title

Javelin throw superstar Neeraj Chopra
PHOTO: PTI

PARIS, 21 JUNE

Olympic medal-winning Indian javelin throw superstar Neeraj Chopra clinched his first Diamond League title in two years, upstaging German rival Julian Weber without hitting the 90m mark in a strong field here. The 27-year-old Chopra won the title late on Friday night with his first round throw of 88.16m in a star-studded field, which featured five from the coveted 90m club.

His second throw measured 85.10m, and he then fouled his next three attempts before recording 82.89m in his sixth and final effort. Weber was second with his opening throw of 87.88m, while Luiz Mauricio Da Silva of Brazil was third with his third-round attempt of 86.62m. "I am happy with my throat....My run-up was fast today. I can't control my speed, but I'm happy with the result and the first position," the Haryana-lad, who has a gold and silver in back-to-back Olympics, told the broadcaster. Chopra had won his last DL title in Lausanne in June 2023 with a throw of 87.66m. After that, he finished second in six DL meetings.

This was his first win in the Paris leg of the prestigious series. He last competed in the Paris DL in 2017 as a junior world champion and finished fifth with a throw of 84.67m.

"I will compete in Ostrava (Golden Spike athletic meet) after four days on the 24th of June. So I need some recovery," he said of his upcoming schedule, which also includes the inaugural Neeraj Chopra Classic in Bengaluru on July 5 -- a World Athletics category A event, which he is hosting.

- 27-year-old Chopra won the title late on Friday night with his first round throw of 88.16m in a star-studded field, which featured five from the coveted 90m club.

Chopra had breached the 90m mark in the Doha leg of the Diamond League on May 16 with a throw of 90.23m for a second-place finish. Weber had won the title in Doha with his last round throw of 91.06m.

Need to work on my core muscles

Star Indian javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra said he will need to work harder on his core muscles and make his body stronger to consistently log 90-plus distances in international competitions.

The body's core muscles play an extremely vital role in generating power in a sport like javelin throw. Chopra, the two-time Olympic medallist, clinched his first Diamond League title in two years on Friday with a throw of 88.16m but fell short of his personal best throw of 90.23m registered at the Doha Diamond League earlier this year, which fetched him a second spot behind German rival Julian Weber.

"Yes, I need some more control when I throw, like on the attack. We are working on it in training —*PTI*

Flamengo floor Chelsea, Bayern face Boca

Bayern Munich advances with a 2-1 win over Boca Juniors

CLUB WORLD CUP

Wallace Yan celebrates CR Flamengo's third goal during their win against Chelsea
PHOTO: X/@FLAMENGO_EN

ATLANTA, 21 JUNE

Flamengo produced a brilliant second-half fightback to beat Chelsea 3-1 at the Club World Cup on Friday as the Brazilian giants became the first team to qualify for the last 16 at FIFA's lucrative new tournament. Pedro Neto had given Chelsea the lead in the first half, but Flamengo, roared on by their frenzied supporters who made up the majority of the 54,019 crowd in Philadelphia, did not deserve to be behind and battled back in the second half. Bruno Henrique came off the bench in the 56th minute and equalised just after the hour mark before setting up former Real Madrid, Manchester City, and Juventus defender Danilo to make it 2-1.

Chelsea were stunned, and their hopes of pulling level again were effectively destroyed when substitute Nicolas Jackson was sent off in the 68th minute for a dangerous tackle on Ayrton Lucas.

Wallace Yan, also on as a substitute, then sealed the victory for the Rio de Janeiro club, the Brazilian league leaders, when he made it 3-1 late on.

Michael Olise fired Bayern Munich into the knockout stages of the Club World Cup, scoring in the 84th minute for a 2-1 win over Boca Juniors on Friday night.

German champion Bayern made it two wins in Group C and advanced to the round of 16 with a game to spare. Olise secured the victory at Hard Rock Stadium after Miguel Merentiel had put Boca in position for a draw with a brilliant solo goal in the 66th. Bayern, which tops the group, took the lead on Harry Kane's clinical finish in the 18th minute and went on to miss a slew of chances before Merentiel's equalizer. Bayern looked like it would be held until Olise's cool finish. Collecting Kane's layoff inside the box, the forward curled a powerful first-time effort low into the bottom corner.

Jamal Musiala was injured again

Star German midfielder Jamal Musiala went off injured only 25 minutes after entering Friday night's Club World Cup match for Bayern Munich and was substituted by national team veteran Thomas Müller in the 82nd minute. Musiala came on in the 57th minute against Boca Juniors. The nature of his injury wasn't immediately known. —*PTI*

GALLE 1ST TEST

Sri Lanka salvage a draw in Angelo Mathews' farewell Test

GALLE, 21 JUNE

Sri Lankan veteran Angelo Mathews bowed out of Test cricket as his final match ended in a tense draw against Bangladesh at the Galle International Stadium.

The first Test of the 2025–27 World Test Championship (WTC) cycle saw both teams exchange punches across five days. Still, the outcome left Sri Lanka holding on and Bangladesh ruing a missed opportunity to script a memorable win. Despite dominating large portions of the match, Najmul Hossain Shanto's side fell short of securing an outright victory, partially due to a conservative approach in the final innings and untimely rain interruptions.

Bangladesh missed out on a rare victory away from home when its series-opening cricket test against Sri Lanka ended in a draw on the rain-affected final day Saturday.

After a prolonged rain break that saw the morning session curtailed to just 80 minutes, there was a window 50 overs still wide enough to force the issue. Najmul Hossain Shanto pressed on to complete his second century of the match a personal milestone for the captain

Sri Lanka 485 (Nissanka 187, Kamindu 87, Nayeem 5-121, Mahmud 3-74) and 72 for 4 (Nissanka 24, Taijul 3-23, Nayeem 1-29) drew with Bangladesh 495 (Mushfiqur 163, Shanto 148, Litton 90, Asitha 4-86, M Rathnayake 3-39) and 285 for 6 decl (Shanto 125*, Shadman 76, Rahim 49, T Rathnayake 3-102). —*PTI*

Angelo Mathews bowed out of Test cricket *PHOTO: X/@ANGE69MATHEWS*

Oksana Chusovitina wins silver on 50th birthday

TASHKENT, 21 JUNE

Uzbek gymnast Oksana Chusovitina remarkably celebrated her 50th birthday by winning silver in the vault at the Gymnastics World Challenge Cup in Tashkent on Friday. Bulgarian Valentina Georgieva, 18, beat the former Olympic and world champion to claim gold while Uzbeki compatriot Shakhinabonu Yusufova took third place.

Chusovitina became the Soviet all-around champion at 13 and the world champion on floor in 1991. She won gold in the team event at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics and silver in the vault in Beijing 16 years later, when she had temporarily switched her allegiance to Germany. In 2021, Chusovitina defied the odds to compete at her eighth Olympic Games in Tokyo, but following the opening day of the women's competition, she bade a tearful farewell after failing to cut through the vault final. —*PTI*

TENDULKAR ANDERSON TROPHY

Sachin Tendulkar lauded Rishabh Pant and Shubman Gill for their centuries *PHOTO: PTI*

Pant goes past Dhoni for most Test centuries

LEEDS, 21 JUNE

Rishabh Pant on Saturday went past MS Dhoni for the most centuries by an Indian wicketkeeper in Test cricket, bringing up his seventh on the second day of the series opener against England here.

Pant struck a six off the first ball of the 100th over of India's innings, clearing the fence off Shoaib Bashir to bring up the milestone.

It was his first century since September 2024 when he scored 109 against Bangladesh.

In 90 Tests, Dhoni had scored 4,876 runs with six tons and 33 fifties at an average of 38.09 and remains the highest run-scorer as an Indian wicketkeeper-batter in Tests.

Pant, who completed 3,000 runs during this innings, also has 15 fifties in 44 Tests and averages nearly 44.

The third in this list is Wriddhiman Saha with two centuries, followed by Syed Kirmani and Farokh Engineer with two each.

Nayan Mongia also scored one century.

Gill and I were trying to bat session by session: Jaiswal

Yashasvi Jaiswal was overjoyed after making his maiden hundred in England, and the Indian opener gave a slice of credit to skipper Shubman Gill for maintaining a calm atmosphere at the other end during their partnership.

Jaiswal and Gill, who also made an unbeaten century, added 129 runs for the third wicket stand to take India to 221 from a shaky 92 for two after the first session.

India navigated through the second session without losing a wicket.

"Whenever I make a century, wherever it is, I enjoy it. I love it as all my centuries are special. But of course, there are some special moments...first century in England," Jaiswal said in the post-day press meet.

The left-hander also threw light on how he and Gill took their alliance forward.

"We were speaking a lot in the middle, and we were trying to take it session by session and try and get as many runs as possible.

Southee defends Stokes' bowl first call

England fast-bowling consultant Tim Southee defended skipper Ben Stokes' decision to bowl first on a dry Headingley wicket, saying they expected the pitch to be conducive for bowlers in the opening session, but were undone by the young and talented Indian batters.

England's decision to bowl first after winning the toss in the first Test of the five-match series backfired as skipper Shubman Gill (127 not out) and Yashasvi Jaiswal (101) made merry on a dry surface to power India to 359 for 3 on the opening day on Friday.

England captain Stokes' decision came in for sharp criticism from former skipper Michael Vaughan, who said he didn't find any logic in the move."With the colour of the wicket yesterday, and a little bit of moisture left in it, if there was a little bit of help in it, it was probably going to be this morning. That was the thinking behind the decision. —*PTI*

India must win opening Test against Eng: Ganguly

KOLKATA, 21 JUNE

India must force a win in the opening Test against England after a dominating start since such opportunities won't come their way everyday, former India skipper Sourav Ganguly said on Saturday.

India posted 471 runs in their first innings after being invited to bat, with Yashaswi Jaiswal, skipper Shubman Gill, and Rishab Pant scoring centuries.

Ganguly felt India were in a prime position to touch the 600-run mark after being 359 for three on the opening day.

"Nobody expects Headingley to be so dry. But what will happen is, if they get 600, it starts getting a bit up and down. India must win this. They won't get this opportunity again," Ganguly told PTI. Leg-spinner Kuldeep Yadav and left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh could not find a place in the playing XI. —*PTI*

U23 ASIAN CHAMPIONSHIP

India women wrestlers win team title

VUNG TAU, 21 JUNE

Putting up a dominating show, Indian women wrestlers won the team title at the Under-23 Asian Championship by winning a medal in each of the 10 categories, including four gold and five silver, here.

Priyanshi Prajapat (50kg), Reena (55kg), Shrishti (68kg) and Priya (76kg) sealed the top-podium places.

Five more Indian women wrestlers made the gold-medal bouts but settled for runner-up finishes.

Neha Sharma (57kg), Tanvi (59kg), Pragati (62kg), Siksha (65kg), and Jyoti Berwal (72kg) won silver medals while Hinaben Khalifa (53kg) won the bronze on Friday.

In Greco-Roman style, Sumit bagged the gold in the 63kg category while Nitesh (97kg) and Ankit Gulia (72kg) won bronze medals.

In the men's freestyle events, Vicky won the gold in the 97kg category while Nikhil (61kg), Sujeet Kalkal (65kg), Jaideep (74kg), Chandermohan (79kg), and Sachin (92kg) will also fight for gold later on Saturday.

Sagar Jaglan (86kg) will clash in the bronze-medal play-off, while Jaspooran Singh (125kg) will also be in medal contention in his weight class. —*PTI*

Indian women wrestlers win team title at Under-23 Asian Championship
PHOTO: SAI MEDIA TWITTER